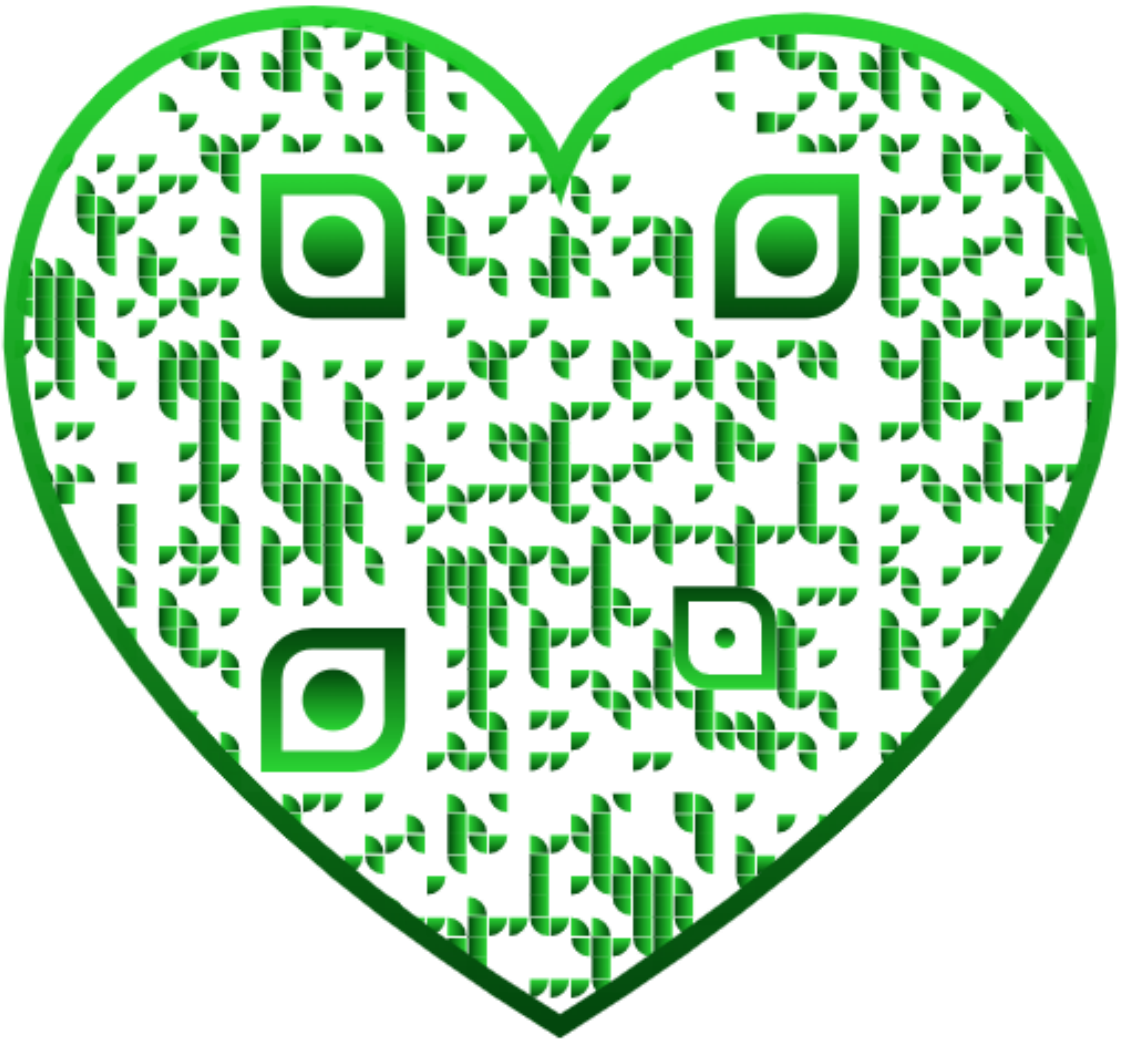
THE METALLICA CLUB MAGAZINE • VOLUME 13 / NUMBER 4 / 2007 • WWW.METALLICA.COM

SO WHAT!



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THE METALLICA CLUB
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As explained in the editor's note, four interviews by Jaan Uhelszki where she grapples with what exactly has been going on in Metallicaland during 2006, what was going on in the studio until the Christmas holidays and what sort of secrets the next Metallica release might hold. Thus we present her four 'fireside' conversations in virtually their entirety. Enjoy.

FEATURES

4 + ROBERT TRUJILLO

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DEPARTMENT

3 + SHORTEST STRAW

A department, a department, your kingdom for a department... and thus we deliver another Shortest Straw, including the horrendous winner of 13.2's '...Straw' (members with kids are advised to shield those young eyes) as well as offering new opportunities to embarrass yourselves via the lens.

editor's note

Hello one and all!

OK. It's February 8th 2007, and I just came out of the jamming room where the band were rehearsing some new songs to prepare for recording (the stuff is sounding pretty fucking great!!!)...this issue contains four fantastic interviews by Jaan Uhelszki, all done in November 2006. I say this because it is VERY IMPORTANT that you know these interviews capture a moment in time, the start of the knuckle-down for this new album project, and everything up to December 2006. Already, so much has happened. Which you will hear about. In due course. In the meantime, enjoy these wonderful pieces, see how it all got going, and now I'll let the sole photographer in this issue (with some damn fine work it must be said) have a few words; I think you've heard of him.

Steffan... Editor... SW!

Hey, guess what.

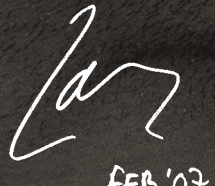
Steffan asked me to take all the pictures for this issue, so I did... no I'm lying.

I asked if I could take all the pictures for this issue, so I did... no I'm lying.

I told Steffan I was taking all the pictures for this issue, so I did... and he nodded yes.

Aahhhh, the beauty of having your own magazine. Everyone should have one. But I beat you to it, and until you get your own, you're stuck with this one and my pictures. But, in all fairness, kudos to old Steff-burger for going along with the idea and however nutty it may seem on the surface, it is really just another attempt to bring you the kinda unparalleled, unique, exclusive, from and by the guys in the band, content that you expect from this astonishing, magnificent and breathtaking (I thought those were the coolest examples the thesaurus.reference.com website could come up with) magazine you are holding... hopefully with both hands.

If you must know (I must, I must!), I've been fiddling with the old camera (Contax) since my offspring came into this world a few ago. Actually, Anton, the man, the myth, the guy with a pretty cool promo pic himself, has to answer for some of the picture passion, especially the black and white part. I usually only shoot black and white 3200 film, to get that grainy, fucked up vibe. Kudos also to the rest of the gang for putting up with my camera and my shit for an afternoon. Ordering James up against a wall, and clicking away at odd angles, instantly qualifies as one of the highlights of an already fairly eventful life. And..., in case you really were wondering, yes, I did take ALL the pix in this issue, every single one, even the ones of myself. Happy days, c-ya in a bit,



SO WHAT!

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shortest straw

SHORTEST STRAW 13.2
The competition (as such) was for clubbers to send highly embarrassing photos of themselves from the old skool days, with a further 150 words describing what that old skool self was about and the stupidest thing ever done. Well well well...in finding winners for our this Straw, there was certainly a shyness to many of you clubbers out there who simply didn't send embarrassing enough piccys of yourselves (of course, perhaps that's because y'all looked beautiful and cool from day one, right?!)...but then there a few gems, real gems, the sort of pics that make you weep in humor and dispair. And the Grand Prize Winner? Step on up Mr. Pete McNally from Howard Beach, New York, because YOU sir are a sight to behold. The jeans, the muscle car, the outrageous Joe Dirt mullet, the excuse of moustache and the, ahem, 'reading material' make you a wonderful man without shame. And for that, Pete wins a limited edition vinyl box set autographed by all the band. Runners-up? OK, Dennis Arroyo from Woodville, Texas gets major plaudits and a runner-up "Master Of Puppets" goodie-pak for some superb pouff-ball hair and the full on 'white leather high-tops and drain pipe black jeans' look going strong. And whilst our other runner-up Tom O'Shea from Colorado doesn't look spectacularly goofy, he edges himself into a "Master Of Puppets" goodie-pak for the egregious mullet he has allowed to grow on his poor toddler's head! Lawks oh lordy man, how can you have allowed such a thing to be done to your own flesh and blood! And yes, going to an REO Speedwagon concert is pretty stupid!

PETE McNALLY

DENNIS ARROYO

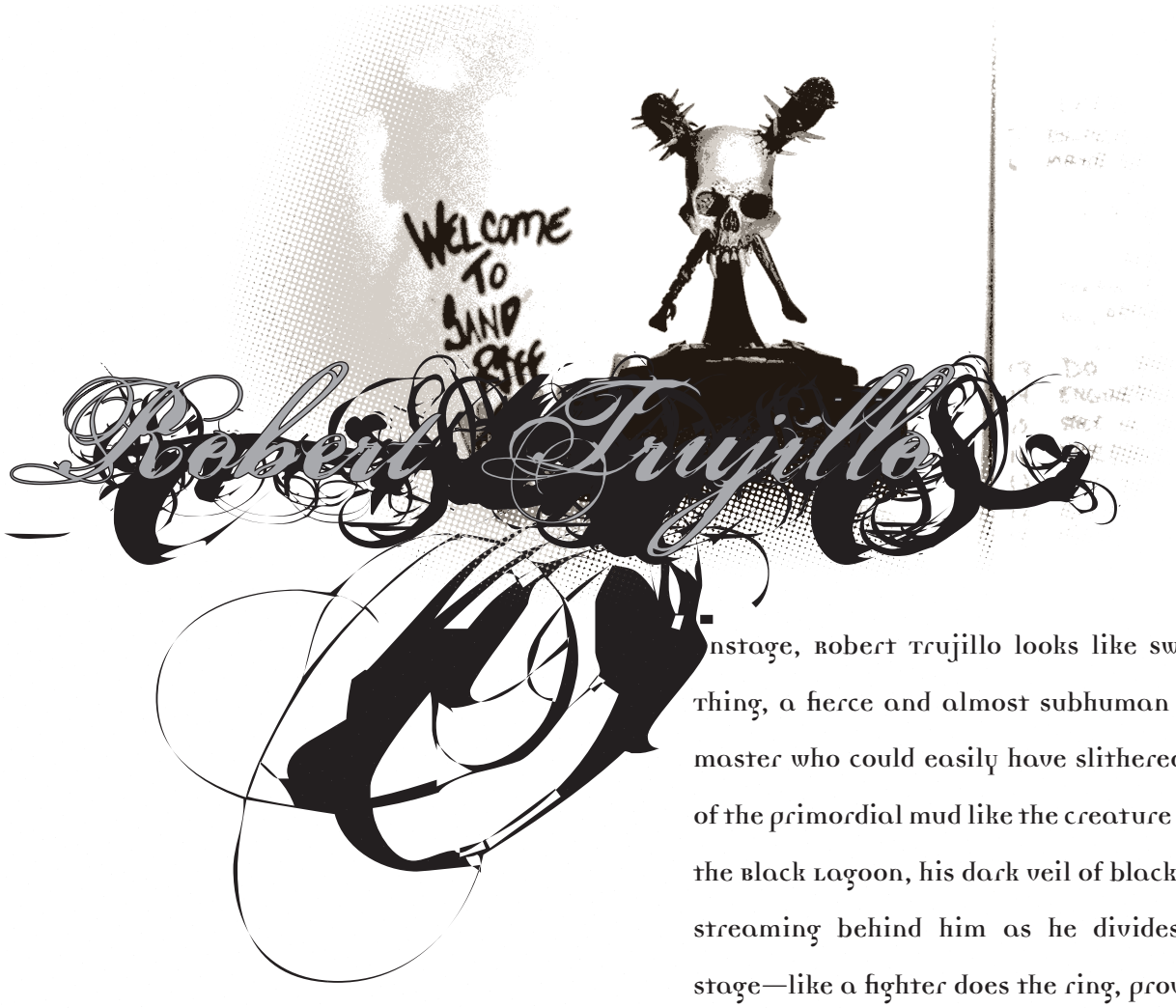
TOM O'SHEA

SHORTEST STRAW 13.4
Brought to you by So What! and issue 13.4's sole photographer, Lars Ulrich
It's simple. Take a SELF-PORTRAIT. We don't care how, just make sure it's taken BY you OF you...digital pics will be allowed, but extra credit will go to those shooting with film. And whichever one our very own photographer deems to be the best will win.

The GRAND PRIZE will see our winner and a guest go to a future Metallica show (tickets are on us, you need to get to the show on your own) where they will meet said-photographer who will then shoot the winner's portrait. A print will then be made and signed before being mailed back to said-winner a few weeks later.

The first runner-up will receive special flat layouts of the 13.4 issue signed by the photographer, whilst the second runner up will receive a copy of 13.4 again signed by the photographer in question.

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE IN BY MAY 15th 2007.



Robert Trujillo

Onstage, Robert Trujillo looks like swamp thing, a fierce and almost subhuman bass master who could easily have slithered out of the primordial mud like the creature from the Black Lagoon, his dark veil of black hair streaming behind him as he divides the stage—like a fighter does the ring, prowling on the balls of his feet his bass slung low and menacing—more assault weapon than instrument. But today, the day after his 42nd birthday, he looks anything but scary, despite the nefarious Halloween decorations still up from the bash in his honor the night before. The fact that there was a party in his honor speaks volumes about how highly he is held in regard by his brothers in arms.

Robert Trujillo

SO WHAT! interview

but it's not just his prodigious skills as a bass wrangler that makes him such a valuable member of Metallica, it's his work ethic, the deep desire to be a full-on member, sometimes staying at the 'office' until 2:00 am to work out one of his bass parts, or to pen a skeleton of a song. But even more than that, Robert Trujillo is just plain nice—a rare quality in rock. In fact Robert Trujillo might be the most affable man in rock. Just ask Les Claypool, Primus leader, high school friend of Kirk Hammett, who once tried out for the bass spot after Cliff Burton's tragic death.

"One of the smartest things they've ever done, ever, is get Robert Trujillo in that band. One is he's a monster of a bass player. But the biggest is he is one of the nicest guys I've ever met in this industry. Especially in the sort of heavy, testosterone region of the music world. He's the guy that buys you the beers and is all happy to see you. He's going to breathe, if he hasn't already, this positive life into that band, which needed some breathing."

And there is nothing in his demeanor that would indicate that being in Metallica has done anything to change that. From his profuse apologies for being a half hour late, due to the first crippling rain storm of the season, to his offer to wipe up a spill in the gleaming kitchen. "Do you want me to clean that up?" he asks Zach Harmon, Metallica's major domo, who keeps a tight rein on every aspect of the HQ. Zach waves him away with the more than capable demeanor of a man who is used to doing the impossible, from finding equipment that has gone missing in an Eastern European country in the dead of night, to scouring a kitchen to such a pristine state that you could perform surgery on the gleaming table. The very same table, incidentally, that the band used to sit around with Phil Towle almost every morning for a year and a half, to air their personal grievances, and then to each throw out ideas for lyrics, in kind of a group think. But no more. This thinking man's metal band has resorted to their more stoic, taciturn ways—keeping more inside than letting it out for an entire world to scrutinize. This is no longer "some kind of monster," but instead a slumbering beast that's getting ready to awaken and record their 10th studio album with Rick Rubin.

Trujillo, an obsessive surfer, has added running into an already physically demanding regime that has whittled him down to a leaner, more feral rock machine. Dressed rather unobtrusively in silver and blue Adidas pants, matching Adidas trainers, a baseball cap brandishing AB, which bears no affiliation to his hometown of Los Angeles (although he does admit that his dentist is in Chicago, the luxury of life on the road) and a Stooges funhouse black t-shirt, he is a study in zen calm. So much so, that he doesn't even seemed fazed as he leans back—too far back—in the rather prosaic office chair on wheels that he's pulled up from the massive console in this practice-room cum studio where all of "St. Anger" was produced.

That won't be the case with this yet-untitled album. Although to be fair, behind where I sit on massive black leather couch is a white board with 69 scrawled titles and a few choice Hetfield renderings. But you know how the saying goes. If I reveal any of the names, I'll have to kill you...

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Why don't I turn this over to Robert Trujillo and let him tell you what it's like to be a member of Metallica three years and counting, how different this is than working with Ozzy Osbourne, why he never ever felt like the new guy—okay, maybe just a little—and how he could give it all up in search of the perfect breaking wave. Although, he wouldn't want to.

Jaan Uhelszki

SW: You haven't started recording the new album yet, but can you tell me what stage you're in?
Robert Trujillo: We're still writing, but the great thing about how we do this is, with the studio and the set-up that we have, we get a pretty realistic idea of what things might potentially sound like. Some of the performances are a little rough, and that's okay, but we can at least sonically get an idea. We also have access to many, many different types of effects, like outboard gear, stuff like that, so we can experiment. Our managers were here and heard some of the material, and they were actually really impressed with some of the sounds we were getting and the sonic aspect of it as well, because it gives them an idea of what things may end up sounding like and the kind of the direction we're going in.

SW: Is it a lot different from the Metallica sound of old, or does it sound anything like the "St. Anger"-era stuff?
RT: It's different in some ways. It's definitely much different than "St. Anger." I think a lot of the "St. Anger" material was bits and pieces of ideas that were sort of pasted together. It wasn't necessarily songs that were rehearsed and fine tuned that way. It had a little bit more of a technical thing going on with that one.

SW: But the thing about "St. Anger," it was almost like it was a big purge, and exorcism of stuff that the band needed to let go of.
RT: Yeah, I feel that way too. I also feel that "St. Anger" was a great launching pad for what's going on now, and the new beginning of Metallica. We have a new producer, a new bass player and kind of a new attitude, too. It's a way for us to kind of look back, and for Lars and James especially, to look back at what they did in the early years and take themselves back to that time creatively and regroup in a way. There's a lot of similarities to the attitude of what was done 20 years ago.

SW: I remember that "St.Anger's" lyrics were written collaboratively. And I don't know if you were in on that, because I think Bob Rock was doing all the bass parts.
RT. Yeah, Bob was the bass player.

SW: But what they were doing before you was, they'd have these bull sessions and everyone would bring what they were writing on. They would throw things out, instead of having James just go into his cave and shut the door and write it. Is the creative process like that again, or has it reverted back to the old school?
RT: No, it's a little bit more old school, but the great thing about what's happening now is James is very, very open. At least for now he's taken on the task of writing lyrics on his own, but he's motivated and inspired by what we have to say and our input. He welcomes it.

SW: You guys keep a very regular schedule now, right? So you come in, in the morning. Do you still sit around and talk about what songs are going to be, or is that too formal?
RT: No, we don't really do that. We get together and we get to work, really. Some mornings are slower than others. There's a lot going on right now with everybody. I mean obviously Kirk's away in Hawaii, just had a baby boy. So that's exciting news. But he's kind of been in and out a little bit. And Lars is going through some personal stuff right now so he's kind of in and out, too. Naturally because of all of that, the schedule's kind of wavered a bit, but when we actually get to work, even if we're just working for four hours, it's amazing the amount of work that we actually get done, you know? We have these "idea CDs" which contain about 60 hours of ideas that have accumulated over the last two years.

SW: Tell me how that works for you, since that seems like a different process than you've done in the past. When you're making an idea CD, you're recording rehearsals or snippets of jams that you want to preserve?

RT: Well, basically what we did was, we had a ProTools recording set-up at our shows. So prior to the show we'd jam for maybe 20 minutes or so, half hour. And if an idea comes up, which they always do, the recorder is on, and we have it.

SW: So it's not so formalized that if you like some riff that you go "hey, we want to save this?"
RT: No, we don't have to. It's there. It's all recorded. I mean it's always running. So if somebody walks into the room on their own and starts messing around with an idea, even if they're by themselves, it gets recorded. And our house engineer who travels with us, he brings all these ideas to the studio and removes the fat, you know?

> Whether it was writing for Ozzy or suicidal or infectious grooves, I always had a major input. So here I am in Metallica, and I realized it's going to be important for me to be a part of this band creatively, and I would have to go the extra mile to get to know our ideas, maybe even try to get to know them better than they know them.

SW: He cuts and pastes it together, then saves it?
RT: Yeah, exactly. The stuff that he thinks may qualify as a decent idea. If there's something that, maybe we're working on a Metallica song, that doesn't need to be there, obviously, he'll omit that. And the end result is we had about 17 CDs with loads of ideas and jams. Basically jams. And a lot of interesting stuff.

SW: You listen to that like on some regular basis?
RT: So over the last few months, actually more than just few months, almost a year now, we've had these different CDs and we listen to 'em, and kind of pick through, take notes.

SW: Like physical notes, right?
RT: Yeah, what we think might potentially be great ideas for songs. And that's how we've been kicking it off. Obviously we're still open to jamming in the room here in the studio, or if somebody has an idea that they worked out at home or something, and came up with, everything's welcome. We're trying to go through as much as possible of this material and kind of mix and match, and create with it. And it's worked out really well, I feel. I mean there's something that feels special about what's been going on with us creatively, especially recently, like in the last month or so, certain things have sparked that I think the Metallica fans are really going to enjoy.

SW: Where does it fit into their canon? Is it like anything they've done before?
RT: Yeah, actually. I think that the guitar production has the flavor of old. I think the heaviness is back. We're not there yet, but lyrically the direction that it may head may have the flavor of old as well. I mean the attitude as far as the head space we're in is sort of free and open. And it seems like Metallica's gone through different phases in their creative process over the years, and they've tried so many different things. They've done the thing where it was just Lars and James, they've done the thing where it was all the guys together, and then collaborating with Bob Rock. And now, as I said with the new producer, with myself and Lars getting more involved as a rhythm section, building songs. We're building some of the material, or some of the sections from a drum and bass angle, you know? Sometimes that kicks a certain idea off, and that's kind of cool because that hadn't really been done as much in the past. It feels like there's a lot of bottom in the material, and we're also developing songs in a dynamic way, too, where we're getting into that mode as well.

SW: You have a bigger role creatively than Jason did. I think there are a couple of reasons, your personality—but I think the other thing is because he wanted in so bad. And I don't know what the dynamic was. I probably do know what the dynamic was, but I think they realized that they should have let him in, but they didn't and it just didn't work out, so they were more open when you came along because they didn't want to make that mistake again.
RT: Yeah.

SW: That's what I see from an outsider's view, but do you think that's why it was so easy for you to become part of the creative process, where it was so hard for him?

RT: I don't know exactly. I know that they were definitely probably not as open to input, they were pretty guarded on a lot of their ideas and on what they wanted between James and Lars. And it takes a bit of work to get into the mix with them, and you've got to, in a way maybe you've got to prove yourself to a certain degree. Take it slow, you don't just want to jump in and start interjecting. If you are going to interject, you want to make sure it's an idea that is going to work. I mean you don't just want to throw a bunch of crap out there and have it get shot down. So you know, for me, I'm just taking my time with all this. And I've done a lot of homework as far as the ideas that I was telling you about over the last couple years. I put a lot of time into getting to know some of that material.

SW: Like going back and listening to the old records?
RT: Taking notes. No, I'm talking about the ideas of the last two years, that we've been developing. And at certain point for me, I felt like if I can relate it to the other bands that I've been involved with, whether it was writing for Ozzy Osbourne or Suicidal or Infectious Grooves, different collaborative situations I've been involved with creatively, I always had a major input in the writing. So here I am in Metallica, and I know that the history hadn't been that way with Jason. I know that Cliff had more of a hand in the writing. And I realized for myself, you know, it's going to be important for me personally to feel better about being in this band creatively, that I would have to go the extra mile to get to know our ideas, maybe even try to get to know them better than they know them. Because everybody gets so busy and involved in other things that it's hard to really sit down and go through all these CDs and these ideas, and the whole process. And if one person in the band can do it, and if it has to be me to take some of that initiative to re-spark that, because it's easy to get burned out on listening and listening and listening. And I made it a point for myself to do that, and so I think that the participation on that end has maybe helped my position creatively with these guys.

SW: The thing is, you did give them your life. I don't think there (was) anything they could have done to stop the flow with Jason. sometimes when institutions reach their climax they have to fall apart.
RT: It's true, yeah.

SW: You're much more of a mellow person. You fit with them, more personality. with him (Jason), I felt he always had an expectation that he was the outsider. He never integrated. It's like he held him-

self separate from them. For me, having been around them for so many years, he was the only one. And we're both from Michigan. Most Michigan people are like, yeah, we're all from D-Town. He was never like that. He had that outsider ethic throughout everything he did, you know?
RT: Yeah, exactly. It's easy with these guys to put yourself in a position where you become the outsider. And you've got to put the sensitivity aside when it comes to that stuff, keep moving forward and keep a positive attitude. And definitely, especially in the creative process, whatever it takes, if you've got to go the extra mile and do some homework to get into the songwriting process, at least for me, that's what I've chosen to do.

SW: And I think you had the expectation you were going to write? You know what I mean, you came in with that.
RT: You know, at some point that's what happened. It was like, well, I could just sit around and be a fly on the wall, or should I start trying to get involved in presenting various ideas and suggestions? And you know, they listen to me now. They respect my opinion. And it's all happened very naturally. It hasn't been like me just jumping in there, going 'Okay, guys. Look, man, you know, lets do it my way' or whatever. No, these guys have been writing together for 24 years or something. They know what they're doing. It's amazing to see James and Lars just feeding off each other. Just bouncing. Sometimes it's overwhelming. And I know how that can be, because I've had that in my career as well. And that's why I just chose to, I choose to let them feed off each other, and then when I feel the timing's right or whatever, then I'll offer my suggestion, and you know, they listen to me. They respect it. And there's definitely a certain amount of respect that they've given me, especially creatively, especially in the last few months.

SW: What was a watershed day, when you went home one day and you said, yeah, it's all working. You were here around "St. Anger" right before it came out, so that's, like, three years ago? That's how long you've been in the band?
RT: Yeah. Yeah.

SW: Okay, so going from that day to when it really felt real...
RT: I would have to say this last year, for me, it's really come together well. I feel that the first year was pretty intense just because I was learning this massive catalog. You know, the whole theme of this last tour, actually the last couple years of touring that we had done, was to pull up various material that hadn't been played much or hadn't been played at all. So it was a challenge. Sometimes this material would come up the night before or something. You know, "Hey, we may do 'Phantom Lord'" or whatever. I mean I got them to do 'Dyer's Eve.' I felt that this is a song that Metallica fans want to hear, and they had never played it.

SW: Never?
RT: No. So let's do this, you know? And I remember being in Paris and finding that right moment to actually ask James if he was up for it, because the other guys had agreed to it, but not agreed to it in front of him. So I was like, 'Hey, James, you know what, we should really give 'Dyer's Eve' a shot. I think that'd be great,' and he was like, 'yeah.' Maybe in the past, he may have just shot it down immediately and said no way. It seems like the attitude now, as I say, is way more open. I think they're a little bit more excited about playing some of the obscure stuff from the past.

SW: I remember, maybe like seven, eight years ago, it was like they were so conscious about being the new-model Metallica that they really didn't want to look back. Around the time of the symphony, it was like they wanted to start a new paradigm and they didn't want to be called even a metal band, you know?
RT: That's true. And I remember that time. I mean that was also something that was happening with Ozzy for a second there, you know, when we were writing it was like, well, we wanted to write more towards the "Blizzard of Oz" and "Diary..." angle and I don't think him and Sharon were really that keen on heading in that direction, you know.

SW: I just didn't like when he became a pop band, do you know what I mean? I remember Black Sabbath from the days I used to be at Creem magazine, and I used to see him and it was like altered states just by the music. And then when he became a pop guy, it's always bothered me, you know? I always want him to go back.
RT: Yeah. Well, we all do. You know, sometimes bands need to go through that. You know, they go through that weird transition and then they almost always end up going back to the magic in the songs which usually goes to the early days.

SW: Yeah. Or to be able to recreate that, or to connect with that energy. I mean it really is the energy, because you can't duplicate it, because you aren't the same person who was writing that.
RT: Right. That's true.

SW: But you have to, there's a feeling that you get. It's an energetic force field, and if you can tap back into it, then you're there.
RT: Yeah. Exactly. It's not something that you can just snap your fingers and it's happening. It happens naturally. And that's the beauty of what I feel has been happening here lately, is that we're tapping into something that I think is special. And I know in my heart when something isn't quite right. I feel the stuff that we've been doing recently has definitely brought a new spark into this whole songwriting process.

SW: When did you guys start it? If there was an official start date for this album, what would it be?
RT: Oh, God, I don't know. I would probably have to say around the time we played with the Rolling Stones, somewhere around there.

SW: Was that inspirational, just being with the Rolling Stones?
RT: Yeah, that was very inspirational. In fact, I would have to say, that was probably around the time when I started to, you know, having a long break and then having time to think about where I should stand in Metallica and what I want to bring to the band, on a performance level where I wanted to raise the bar. Even just things like conditioning—

SW: Like just physical conditioning so you could have the stamina to be there?
RT: Yeah, just trying to fine tune things on a vocal level, and—

SW: You are more fit than when I first met you. Thinner, too.
RT: Basically what I'm doing now is I'm on this plan where I'm trying to, how do you say, retrain my body. My body mechanics. I was having a lot of physical issues when I first came into the band. My knees were bad.

SW: You were wearing shorts. They were cold.
RT: Yeah. Well, I used to run a lot. I used to jog a lot and I blew out my knees. And as you get a little bit older you go through these transitions where you have to regroup. Like we were talking about coffee. I don't drink coffee anymore. It jacked my insides up and things like acid reflux, stuff like that. It's like I've had to sort of do this whole strengthening process on my legs and my lower back and just things that will help me become a better performer next time we tour, which hopefully will be next summer. And so I've just taken things like that more seriously.

SW: How old are you now?
RT: Forty-one.

SW: Ooh, that's a good year.
RT: But in relating to the band and how I want to improve my game onstage.

SW: And your mental thing is different too. You know, it's like you're creating your own reality. I mean I watch how careful you are about your word choices. It's almost like you've gone through an internal process where you're trying to create what you want now, by asking for what you want. Where'd that come from?

RT: Yeah. I've done a lot of thinking, and I do that sometimes. I've done that in many situations that I've been in, where I try to figure out what's going to be the best for me and the most positive kind of approach.

SW: But just talking about when you used to write songs in other bands, that's what I mean, is that you have that extra patience that you were going to be able to do songwriting here. It's like you've created that reality, and I think that's what sets you apart.
RT: Yeah. Just to be involved, and to know what's going on. It's like if we're working on a particular song I want to know that song inside and out. These guys, James, he's in it all the way when he's working on a song. I mean it really becomes a part of him. And I want these songs to be a part of me too. No matter who comes up with the groove or the melodies or whatever, that's fine, but I still want to get to know that song and get to know every note of it if I can. But like I was saying, probably around the time of the Rolling Stones. It's like we got together to do these shows.

SW: That was last winter?
RT: Yeah. And this was great for me because prior to that I had done some training to gear up for this. And we actually—

SW: What kind of training?
RT: A lot of cardio-blasts, like sprinting and stairs.

SW: Working with a trainer or just yourself?
RT: Not like weight, not necessarily weights. More—

SW: That wouldn't help you onstage. I mean that would just help the lean body mass stuff like—
RT: Exactly. So it was cool because I made a point to sort of prepare for this, and the show actually, it was fun. And I wasn't tired. I felt as a band, even, with Lars especially, we were in the pocket. You know, we were grooving. For the first time in a long time, we were grooving. And that was cool and that made us feel good. That kicked things off in the right way, and got us going on this songwriting thing. And then "Master Of Puppets," when we did the tour, celebrating and commemorating the 20 years of the release of "Master of Puppets," we learned that album inside and out. It was the first time these guys had done that. I mean—

SW: That's all you played on that tour, no other songs?
RT: No, we played like eight other songs, but the highlight was playing "Master of Puppets" top to bottom. Like if you were listening to the vinyl back in the day and you put on the first song and you roll through the whole thing to the very end, you know?

SW: What a great idea.
RT: It was, and it was a success. It was something that we put a lot of effort into. I was here working on these songs sometimes until two in the morning, and when everybody went home I was trying to figure out some of what Cliff was doing, and trying to get it as right as I could. And everybody really stepped up. Lars was really holding things back. It was grooving a lot better than it had.

SW: It's better when he's restrained. When he goes all balls to the wall, it's like he's not connected to that inner rhythm, you know?
RT: Well, for the first time in the couple years that I've been in this band and many, many shows, I really felt like we were locked in, like really locked in. And it wasn't this hyper speed thing, it was like—even the fast stuff like 'Disposable Heroes,' it was all grooving. And I feel that it was a success, and it was also something that in a way helped set us up and prepared us even more for the creative flow.

SW: Yeah. Because you honored the past, that's why. That was a brilliant move to have done that.
RT: Exactly, we honored the past and in a way I feel we captured some of that magic. And going out there and playing about, I don't know, maybe it was fifteen shows or so. You know, most of them with the "Master Of Puppets" deal going on. And that in a way, really I think it set us up for this next phase of the journey. And at that time I felt even more connected to Metallica, you know? It was like diving into the past, diving into that incredible body of music. So I felt more attached to this band and the spirit of it as well. And that's kind of where we are now, you know. Things in the last year or so, just kind of happened where it's just escalated to where we are now, you know, coming up with some really great, fun, kick-ass ideas.

SW: Was there any good that came out of the whole Dr. Phil stuff that you can apply now? Is some of his influence still being felt?
RT: I think for that time, I mean I came in at the later side of all that, but I think for that time where they were, where James' head space was, coming out of his rehabilitation, I would say it was a good thing, because it helped them to communicate on a different level. They hadn't done that probably at all. I mean, so yeah, I think it helped them to work with him.

SW: Actually never. You know, because they were such macho guys. It was like, no, you don't do that.
RT: Yeah, so I think it was positive in that sense. But at a certain point in time, you've got to let go and free yourself from that.

SW: It's an artifice to me, you know?
RT: Yeah, exactly. And the guys realized that but he didn't realize that.

SW: No, because he believed in his process.
RT: He did. I mean Phil Towle would have loved to have been onstage with a pair of maracas or conga drum. I mean—

SW: Like Dr. Landy with Brian Wilson, you know?
RT: He would have loved it. And who knows what he would have pushed for if he was still hanging around.

SW: You're supposed to outgrow therapy. That's the goal of therapy, is to get you well.
RT: I think it was his therapy, too. I think in a way it was Phil's therapy.

He became so attached to these guys and the power and the magic that Metallica actually has.

SW: It's like the Roadrunners' Jonathan Richmond song, 'The power of the magic.' That's true, though. I think that people who aren't around it a lot, and "it" being like such an amorphous thing, are so intoxicated by the power of music and the power of celebrity that they don't understand it. They think that because they're attached to it they absorb some of it. And it's not that. The power is within everybody. And you have your own power. Like he would have his own juju, having only to do with his profession. But the other thing, it was so much bigger than life and he was like an old guy who'd worked with golfers, you know?

RT: Yeah, this wasn't a part of his world, and he entered it and became a part of it, and it consumed him. And he like fell in love with it, I think. And then they, I mean I could say that they broke his heart, but they needed to. It's like a girlfriend that you're like, 'okay, you know, it's over. Go away!'

SW: That's really, really true. I know, I think about that too. Because I've done this all my life, so I started in a time where rock stars and journalists, and everybody was the same. It wasn't such a big corporate thing. And I've always thought, and I contend that we are all the same, but there's something when someone gets onstage that elevates them. It's like you drank the secret elixir. It's like when you're onstage you're a different being, you're superhuman. And you come off and you're the same. But if you haven't been around it all your life, you think it's so different. But you have to always have that yin and that yang about it.

RT: I know. I have a hard time with my friends who, I mean just from being in Metallica. Like I've got people I've known forever that have seen me with Suicidal Tendencies or Ozzy, and everybody's cool. And then once I got in Metallica it's like even some of these people got weird. You know, I went to Chicago last year, and believe it or not my dentist is in Chicago, which is really strange...

SW: I do that, because I've lived so many places, I have different practitioners all around the world.

RT: ...yeah. And then you get comfortable with, you know, that particular practitioner and you want to go back when you can. So anytime I can, I go see my dentist in Chicago. I hadn't been there in a year because we didn't tour, and I was just there for one night and some of my Chicago buddies took me to a bar that I would always go to when I was in Chicago, and suddenly it turned into a meet-and-greet. It was like I didn't expect any of that and it turned literally into a meet-and-greet. And it really surprised me because it was never that way before. It was always just kind of mom and pop style, real down home, and there was none of that. People didn't really care, and all of a sudden this whole thing escalated to a different level that was uncomfortable for me. I mean trust me, I definitely appreciate people being respectful, into what I do or what we do as a band. But when it gets weird and people are lining up to take a picture or get autographs and half these people you've known for years. If they're bringing their friends, you know, it's like people you hang out with when you go there but then they've got like ten extra people with them.

SW: But do you say to them, 'Hey, I'm the same guy?' I mean do you like try to get down with them when you're in the middle of them acting like you're a member of Metallica rather than just being who you are?

RT: I tried. Sometimes it's better to escape. The craziest thing about that is whenever this happens you hear nothing but apologies. I mean you're not saying anything to them like "dude," you know. They're just going, 'Hey, Rob, look, I'm really sorry, man. But can we just take a picture with so-and-so and sign this for my buddy? I'm really sorry. I know you don't...' you know. And it's amazing because you're always hearing the apology and these are people you've known for so many years.

SW: It's funny, Joey Ramone was a really good friend of mine and he'd come to stay and I'd go, 'okay, I feel like it's a "Hard Day's Night" and I'm Paul's grandfather. Come on, just sign this for my next door neighbor.' It was always good to approach it like that. Because I never pretended, because he was Joey to me but he was Joey Ramone. When he died it was like the world lost Joey Ramone. But I always just made a joke of his celebrity. But people who've been that elevated a celebrity for so long, like them and Kiss members, that becomes so much a part of them, so they get used to being separate from the mainstream, you know? It's a weird dynamic. If there's a price of fame, that's the price of fame.

RT: That is the price of fame.

SW: Not the privacy. It's that lack being able to be who you are.

RT: I have a friend who is a professional soccer player. He played on the Mexico national team. He was in two World Cups, actually. He plays professionally for a team called Chivas, USA, and he's the top paid player in the United States. He's Mexican. I think maybe he's got a sponsorship with Coca Cola, or stuff like that, or Corona beer, and they've got TV commercials of this guy down in Mexico. And he's a huge metal fan. I mean this guy is for real. I mean Metallica I guess a few years back played five shows in Mexico City. He went to four of them, and he loves even like Carcass and DSI, and he's into it. But we were talking about this exact topic, about fame, and for someone like him, being a soccer star, it's hard for him to even just walk around Los Angeles. There's so many Hispanics. Or Texas, or wherever. But he says he always tries, no matter what's going on in his personal life he always tries to be positive with these people and really respect their wishes, sign what he can, and he knows that that is the price of fame.

SW: Yeah, there's great responsibility. It's not just the role model part, but there's a responsibility because you're going to change their life and you can change it one of two ways, you know? And

that's what you have to do. it's like noblesse oblige. you have to do that. and i've met so many kids whose lives have been changed by rock stars. i remember because i did tons of stories on kiss... how awful they started treating fans... "no. you're gonna sell it on e-bay." that's just fucked up, because then the kids will always remember that...
RT: Yeah, you know, you have some of these cats that are professionals with the autographs and all that, and you always know who they are because they always wait outside the hotel with their blue Sharpies.

sw: yeah, exactly, because it reproduces better, you know?
RT: Yeah, yeah. So those are the ones you gotta watch out for. But usually you know who they are. But definitely, I mean there has definitely been an incline on the popularity meter since joining Metallica. But I tell you, San Francisco, it hasn't been, it's not a problem.

sw: nobody gives a shit here. that's the good part about here, they pretty much leave people alone. it's like it's just not cool.
RT: Same thing in Venice. I mean I live down in Venice and I've been there forever and people are cool, man. Going to Hollywood, different story.

sw: but people from hollywood aren't natives, you know? so you have that. let's switch to rick rubin, he's working with you too now. has he not been hands-on with this project yet?
RT: Rick Rubin, he's a very busy man, and we understand that. I think for me personally, I think in some ways it's been a good thing for us. At some point, yes, he's going to get very involved in what we're doing. I think that right now it's too soon. My personal opinion. I think that the important thing about what's happening now is that Metallica is collaborating, Lars and James are feeding these wonderful ideas off each other, and there's nobody to interfere with that.

sw: which is good because it's much more fertile that way.
RT: Exactly. And I would hate to see a producer come in and change that magic at this point. I think it's more important that we get the framework and the blueprints of our songs to where we feel really good about them, and then our producer can listen to them and take it hopefully to another level.

sw: yeah. that's what they're supposed to do though, you know?
RT: Yeah, I agree. And so I think it's good that we've been able to work this way and we haven't really needed Rick right now.

sw: so mostly you're just tracking, and you'll probably just take everything down to la in the end when it's time to actually lay it down, right? (there are no fixed plans to record away from hq or at hq right now, thus everything and anything is possible.)
RT: Yeah. When we're comfortable with the arrangements and we've got lyrics and melodies in order and the songs actually become songs, that would be great, to just be able to go down to wherever we're going to track and just lay these things down. Like really get to know the songs that we're going to record and actually plan and record them, and keep the momentum going.

sw: do you have any songs that are fully done?
RT: We have quite a few songs that are feeling very complete, you know, that are ready for Rick, basically. In fact, I think now we could definitely start using his input.

sw: is there a timeline where you want to start tracking?
RT: I know that Lars would like to think that we could be tracking sometime around January. So we'll see what Rick's schedule is. Depends on him and what he wants to do.

sw: and why rick rubin? did you choose him, or did he come to you?
RT: I think it was a little bit of both.

sw: i've never met him. people talk about him like he's a religious icon, and it's probably because he's such a spiritual cat.
RT: Yeah. I'll tell you this. The couple times that we've gotten together with him, he has made some suggestions that have really helped the mindset of Metallica. Just like things like, you know, taking it back. Going back to "Master Of Puppets" and that frame of mind that Lars and James and Kirk were in when that was all going down, and how that music was created. Re-acquainting with that creative energy that was happening back at that time. And right off the bat James has a lot of respect for Rick, and that's important, and if Rick's going to make some suggestions, James is definitely going to listen to him.

sw: he didn't have to pass the metallica test.
RT: No, no. No, he has a lot of respect, and mostly because he's had good conversations with him and he feels comfortable with him on a personal level. Rick has even made suggestions as to the tunings of some of the songs and maybe going back to some of the old school tunings, which is cool because that's something actually that I had thought about, trying some stuff in a standard tuning. So often bands will resort to down tuning everything, and that's good for certain things. Sometimes it can take away from the vocal, I think.

sw: that's what they've been doing in recent years, down tuning rather than using to standard tuning like they used to, yeah.
RT: Yeah. And I believe depending on the song, it's open territory but I think there's something special about writing stuff in standard tuning as well.

sw: it's brighter.
RT: Yeah, it's brighter, there's more angst to the vocal I think. You get sort of this natural aggressive tone, a grit to the voice. Like you listen to Sabbath stuff, and Ozzy, he's got that high pitched voice but there's like this bit of raspiness to it and edge.

sw: but he was closer to his own darkness then, you know? i've known him a really long time, i mean way pre-sharon, and there was something more mythic about him. he wasn't afraid of who he was. he didn't want to be like this pop star, he just wanted to be. he just wanted to purge what was in him. like what was in had to come out. and then he had a vision of who he was supposed to be and he stopped being that other guy, you know? to me i think it's a great loss.
RT: Yeah. You know, I think back in the early days it was like the Wild West and he was a cowboy, man. He was a pirate, you know? And he didn't care, he just wanted to have fun and make music. So I guess that's what Rick's talking about with us, bringing it back to the days in the garage, and having more of that attitude. That's one thing that Rick brought up, too. He was saying he wanted us to play more. You know, 'You guys gotta play more.'

sw: you mean just play out in the world, or play like rehearse?
RT: You have to play out in the world and jam. You know, it's so easy to get stuck in the control room where you're not actually playing together. So we've actually spent a lot more time out there jamming things out.

sw: tell me a little bit what the day is like. you guys start at around eleven every day?
RT: Yeah.

sw: okay. what do you do, go out there and play right away? what's the first thing you do when you come in?
RT: It depends. I mean I'll give you an example. Lately we've been listening to these idea CDs and we'll go through various jams and stuff. And then we'll say, 'Wow, that's cool to a particular idea.' And we'll get out there and we'll go, 'let's go play.' So we'll go play. And maybe it's a jam that we'll do for 20 minutes, you know? And we'll jam it out, we'll variate the idea a couple different ways, and then we'll come back in here and we'll go on to the next set of ideas, and go, 'Okay, that sounds good, let's go play.' And then we'll go in the room, we'll go back in there. So we have been having a bit of this rotation, and we're laying down these ideas. We hear 'em, kind of learn 'em, and then we go in there and jam 'em out and variate 'em. And

that's what we've been doing lately. And then maybe James will come up with a vocal idea on the spot. He'll try it a few different ways, you know, lay it down so it's there forever, and that's what we've been doing lately. And pretty much that's how it's been going. We work on an idea and we start building it and building it and building it and running with it, and developing it. And when we start feeling like it's burning us out a little bit, we move on. And so we don't kill ourselves with the same thing. And that's what we've been doing.

SW: And have you been agreeing on anything? Like the creative differences, how do you express that? Is there ever tension? Please don't tell me you're all on good behavior all the time, because that wouldn't be Metallica, either.

> There's definitely tension. The thing that's different now is ***people are open*** to trying something even if they don't really like it. And the beauty of that is we record it, we have it. We can always look at that idea and kinda yay or nay it, ***thumbs up, thumbs down.*** But it's there, it's recorded.

RT: No, no. There's definitely tension. The thing that's different now is people are open to trying something even if they don't really like it. And the beauty of that is we record it, we have it. We can always look at that idea and kinda yay or nay it, thumbs up, thumbs down. But it's there, it's recorded. Because there's lots of stuff, especially there's stuff that we'll record and Lars will just be like, 'Ah, I don't like that idea.' A lot of the stuff, kind of the shuffle type of stuff, the swing beats and stuff, he tends to not really like that. And sometimes we'll get really excited about it and he'll be the one that's, he has that look on his face and he's just like—

SW: You do it really well, I can even see his head going that way.
RT: Yeah, he's just bumming on it. Not into it. And you know, if anything, rather than turning into a fight or anything, we have it, we record it, it's there, and we move on. But—

SW: Maybe that's the legacy of Phil, the good legacy.
RT: Yeah, that could be the good part of it. But actually beyond Phil on that, I think it's just us being a team, you know? There's tension but the tension, it's controlled. And that's a good thing.

SW: Who usually gets their own way?
RT: Lars.

SW: Yeah, exactly, I know.
RT: Lars.

SW: I know. Let me see if I covered everything. Oh, what about Bob Rock? I don't know, nobody's ever okay. It's like changing hairdressers, you know? I mean you know your hairdresser always wants to stay with you, you know?
RT: Yeah. I don't really know. I mean, I haven't seen him lately, or spoken to him. I think that he's okay. I think that I think he feels free in a way to explore other opportunities with different bands and maybe some bands that are more up-and-coming, and maybe even some bands that, I know he's been working with a lot more Canadian groups. I don't know what's going to happen with Rick but the people involved with this band really have to lock it down and kind of immerse themselves in the world of Metallica.

SW: Bob Rock had a really long run with them, and he was so closely identified with them, it might be a really good thing for him to break out of that, and prove what a kick ass producer he is in other arenas. To show he still has it, and isn't just Metallica's dog.
RT: Yeah, so I think he's fine. I mean in any situation like that I think in the very beginning, maybe you feel the hurt and change is always a bit weird and strange and difficult.

SW: Yeah, who likes it? You know it's necessary, and you're always better for it, but nobody runs with their arms open going, 'oh, I want to change.' It's forced on you and then you grow from that.
RT: I know for me, even just from the transition from working with Ozzy Osbourne and joining up with Metallica, it was an awkward transition because I felt so committed to Ozzy and Sharon, and it was kind of difficult to let go. But once I did let go, it's like I learned something new about myself. I learned something new about music.

SW: What did you learn?
RT: Well, what I learned about myself is what it was like to be in a band again and that feeling you get from being a part of—like with Ozzy I was a sideman. But at times you almost feel like you're in the band. But if you really break it down, the band is Ozzy.

SW: Ozzy and Sharon.
RT: And that's the band. And when I got with Metallica, they'd have meetings and I would be up in my room working on some of the catalog music or something and James would be like, 'Where's Rob? He's supposed to be here at the meeting with us, because we're in this together.' That was really important to him. And I had not experienced that in years, since I was with probably Infectious Grooves. Because even with Suicidal Tendencies it was more based a lot around Mike Muir. At first it was kind of uncomfortable because I didn't know what that was like, it'd been so long since I felt a part of anything. Then after a while, you become a part of the decision-making process and your opinion is respected and they value it, and that's something that's very special. I learned how to share again, and these guys, that's what they do with each other. They're sharing a lot of personal issues, stuff like that. We'll get together and we'll rap out if there's a problem, and it doesn't even have to be band-related, it can be personal. And you share that stuff, you know? As I said too, in a relationship sense, if something's not right, people are pissed off, they'll hash it out for a minute and then they'll resolve it.

SW: Yeah you don't build up resentments. You know what strikes me after talking to you, is that after 17 years Jason Newstead always felt like he was "the new guy," yet you've only been in Metallica for three years and you don't seem to feel that.
RT: Right. The new guy thing, there's different ways to look at it. It's like I don't feel like the new guy right now, as I sit here, and what we've been doing creatively. It feels really good and I don't feel so much of that. Like there were times prior to this creative process when I did. You know, I felt like if I don't contribute and I don't take initiative and go the extra mile to be able to put myself in the position where there's that respect and those sort of factors, I kind of set it up for myself. It's like I'm responsible for where I'll end up in this band, as far as things like respect and them valuing and respecting my opinions on musical ideas and stuff like that. And so in a way it's helped me feel a lot more comfortable with myself in terms of the band. It's not like the new guy thing anymore. It's like I feel more a part of it. I feel like the songs are becoming a part of me, in that way. But you know, once I get on an album and we have a release and everything, for me it's going to be a very special moment, you know?

SW: Yeah. And now Rick Rubin will be the new guy.
RT: Yeah, Rick's definitely the new guy, too.

SW: You're all very conscious of creating a new Metallica and the fact that you're there and Rick Rubin makes the transition easier because it looks like a new band and you're part of this new paradigm.
RT: Right. And also, Rick has done so much in his career and he obviously deserves a lot of the respect that he's given. For me I feel like I've been involved with some great projects and toured with some great musicians. I mean I recorded on Jerry Cantrell's last solo album, and that was a special experience for me. I mean it was a rocky one. It was a roller coaster ride from hell at times, but I learned a lot from it. So I feel blessed in that sense. My journeys with Ozzy, the highs and lows of it, because at some times it was really frustrating. On the last album he did, I felt good about the fact that at least I had some music that I wrote and it made it on the album, and they were some of the heavier songs. I felt good about that. It was an accomplishment. I feel my years with Suicidal Tendencies were, we paid our dues. And so I feel in a way I've been doing this long enough and it's been this amazing journey for me, and now to be with Metallica, and explore the world of Metallica, is great.

SW: What'd they like most about you? Did they tell you why you got the job?
RT: You know, I think they liked the energy and the way maybe that I played some of their music. Maybe the attitude.

SW: Because you tried out, right?
RT: Yeah. I had to try out. For me it was kind of a win-win situation because on one hand I was jamming with Metallica, man. Just to be able to come up here and get invited, and play 'Battery.' And what else did we jam? 'Creeping Death.' 'For Whom the Bell Tolls.' I knew all the songs so I wasn't too freaked out when we started playing.

SW: 'Creeping Death' was the perfect song for your playing style. I bet that's the song that really cinched it for you.
RT: It was fun. And then if I didn't get the gig, you know, there were other things that I was doing creatively that I was really excited about and there were other tour opportunities. So it was never like if I wasn't going to be in Metallica, the door would shut and my career was over. It was kind of like more of an icing on the cake situation. And it actually, for me it's become more than just icing on the cake, way more than that. It's like I was saying, I learned so much more about myself and about just the business of music, from a business perspective. Lars is amazing with that stuff, he really is. And as a songwriter, it's like going to school and learning about the art of writing rock songs every day that I'm here with them. So what makes it such a precious, incredible journey for me, is the fact that I am learning. I'm sitting here, I don't know what point in my career, but it's not like I'm 18 years old or anything.

SW: What bass player did you admire when you were growing up?
RT: I grew up listening to a lot of everything. My inspiration as a bass player came a lot from the jazz fusion guys, like Jaco Pastorius and people like Stanley Clarke. But I was also really, really inspired by Black Sabbath, Geezer Butler. John Paul Jones from Led Zeppelin, for sure.

SW: He's such an underrated player. He doesn't get enough credit. You know what's crazy, so many of Zep's songs are bass-led songs. People always think of them as being—
RT: Guitar, yeah.

SW: But they're not.
RT: No, it's all about the rhythm section. The rhythm section was so strong in both of those bands, but definitely Led Zeppelin.

SW: Do you feel like bands like Trivium and The Sword are breathing down Metallica's neck?
RT: Well, I think it's a great honor to have musicians like the guys in Trivium be inspired by Metallica, but it's not just Trivium, there's a lot of other bands, too. It's new and exciting because it seemed like people were trying to denounce metal about ten years ago.

SW: Yeah, the '90s were very unkind to metal.
RT: Yeah. You know, things were a little weird there. And I think it's great that these young bands are coming up, they know how to play their instruments. They've got technical ability. They take pride in their instrument, which is great. There's a lot more practicing going on, and it's gotten to the point where I don't think guitar players are going to get away with just the three-chord thing anymore.

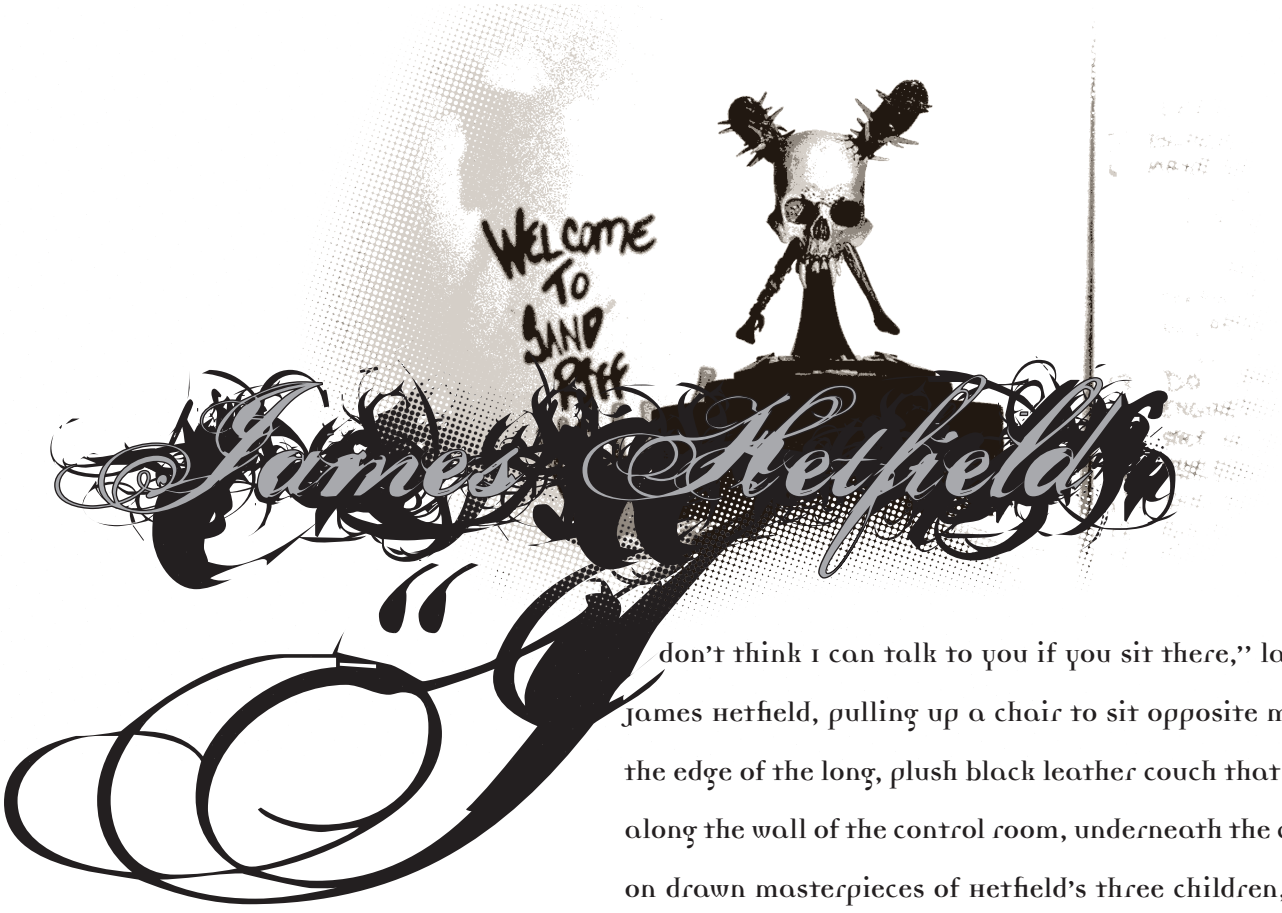
I mean it's nice to be able to do that but really, it's great to see that guys are exploring other territories. To me, in a lot of Metallica's music there's even kind of a classical flavor to it, and a lot of these guys are picking up on that and exploring that end of it too. You know, bands like Mastodon, and I think that's great. So, you know, they're great guys. They're a fun band, they're awesome. We toured with them a lot this summer, and they'll be around a long time, you know?

SW: One thing that would surprise fans about you.
RT: Right, okay. I'll tell you something that's funny. I could easily get the same high and the same rush off of getting a tube ride, when you're surfing than I do from being onstage. When you actually get a tube ride and you're in the curl, know what I mean? And you come out of that thing, and you get such a rush. It's the same high that I get when when I'm performing onstage. Some people, they can't understand that rush. I feel bad for people that have never experienced that high of being onstage, but the closest thing I can acquaint it to for me is surfing. When I say getting tubed, or getting a really good long ride, it's the same high. I know for Kirk, too. You feel that rush from that. And at one point, I remember when I first started getting into the mix with Metallica I had spoken to Jason, and I had told him—this is before we really got things rolling as far as me being in the band. He had some questions about some of the Ozzy Osbourne material. And he was saying, 'well, you know, you're in a band now'. It hadn't sunk yet, and I was at the stage where I sometimes get to when I come into something from the beginning: I look, I analyze and check out the worst case scenario. That way I can prepare myself for the worst. I will dabble and check out the possibility of something not working out, just to set myself up for that. But he told me, 'Well, you know, it's cool. You know you're in a real band now, you know? It's not like the side man thing anymore.' I said, 'I could easily just kind of walk away from the music thing and be on an island and just surf, and I would really feel great about that.' And he couldn't believe it. But basically, I could easily abandon rock and roll and metal, I mean it's still in my spirit and in my heart, but I could. When I'm in a place like Tahiti and I'm out in the tropics and I'm out there in nature and surfing, I'm really at peace.

SW: That's so well-balanced. Have you always been this sane? Or did you become this way with age?
RT: I think I've become this way with age. I could easily end up being that guy, 60 years on a beach.

SW: And maybe you will.
RT: Now I'm married and I have two kids and that changes everything and that's a new challenge for me. For me my whole life changed in the past three years. I'm in Metallica, I'm married, I've got a two-year-old son and I've got a two-month-old daughter now, and that is a whole other incredible, beautiful experience. So all these amazing things have happened in just the last three years for me. But if I didn't have a wife and kids I could easily put myself on an island and just surf, and live off the land.

SW: You have that confidence, and you look like nothing ever makes you nervous.
RT: Oh, you know. Plenty makes me nervous.



James Hetfield

"I don't think I can talk to you if you sit there," laughs James Hetfield, pulling up a chair to sit opposite me on the edge of the long, plush black leather couch that runs along the wall of the control room, underneath the crayon drawn masterpieces of Hetfield's three children, and beneath the birth announcement of Angel Hammett—a baby photo with the head of the mustached father pasted on top, a daunting collage to say the least. "Lars always sits there, and I really can't get that out of my head."

It's a little too early in the morning for me to come back with any witty repartée, and as always with Hetfield's dry sense of humor, it's hard to know when, and if, he's kidding. The first time I met him he assured me he had sliced off a finger in a hunting accident with Faith No More's Jim Martin, and super-glued it back on. I'm still not sure whether he was telling the truth or not, and can't help but steal a gaze at the offending digit. Just in case he's serious, I move over a foot or so, in case he decides to break out the superglue and literally put me in my place. I should also mention that it's barely nine o'clock in the

James Hetfield

SO WHAT! interview

morning, i'm under caffeinated, still groggy from having to leave my berkeley digs at 7:00 a.m for this confab. what happened to rock 'n' roll hours? you know, sandwiched somewhere between the load-out and last call?

sunny of disposition, hair still damp from the shower, eating a rather massive bowl of honey nut cheerios, james hetfield sits in clean, well-worn but spotless jeans, a pristine white biker shirt with screaming skulls and roses, and a pair of charcoal grey hiking boots. if it weren't for the grey streaking his idiosyncratic facial hair, he'd look like a younger version of himself, all bristling kinetic energy and lean body mass. while the past few years have (as much-reported) taken their psychic toll on him, james seems to have benefited from the nine months in rehab, the healthy regime that he's on, and renewing his marriage vows. he's almost gaunt in his leanness, looking a lot like the alpha male rock god of the band's earliest days, without the preponderance of hair.

the reason for the early appointment is the stringent schedule that metallica are keeping, beginning at 11:00 a.m. sharp every single day. why this strict adherence to time? they're religiously working their way through the riff tapes they've made in preparation to recording their first ever rick rubin-produced album. yes, before you ask, this boils down to metallica demo-ing after 25 years as one of rock's biggest behemoths.

"i always think the last thing we've done is the best thing. i don't have the patience to listen to all that stuff we recorded when we were jamming, but luckily lars does," says james, referring to the collected library of found sounds and inventive jams that have also been raided to help in forming the basis of this album.

despite their different work ethics, there is very little animosity between the infamous best friends/bandmates anymore. perhaps that was one of the most valuable things to come out of their time with phil towle, the psychologist-cum-motivational coach that figured so largely in their recent history, and the unintentional villain in the documentary that traced their thorny road to recovery and sanity in 2004's "some kind of monster." prior to that, hetfield and ulrich's turbulent and often rancorous 'keith and mick' dynamic produced nine massively successful albums. but then they imploded, and the first post-implosion fruit was the very personal "st. anger," a sometimes prickly but always revealing document of those times. in hindsight, that album wasn't anything so much as an exorcism of demons that had been festering for the past two decades.

"we won't be making that kind of album again," promises james, sitting up a little taller in his reclining chair, as if to emphasis his resolve. "i'm not exactly sure what kind of album it will be," he says, betraying only a little bit of hesitancy. "but it won't be 'st.anger.'"

since overcoming his addictions, he's a more careful man, more measured in what he says, and more resolute as a result. "i'm a little ashamed that we let all that out, but what's done is done. i remember one thing clearly that phil said. we weren't doing all this work for "st. anger," we were doing it for the next album. and he was right."

while hetfield's infamous anger lurks somewhere beneath the surface, it's hard to detect it anymore. "sure we still fight," he laughs, running a restless hand over his reddish-blonde beard. "but we don't take it as personally anymore. we just do it my way," he laughs, not expecting anyone to believe it. what hasn't changed is that irreverent sense of humor, seen in the number of green-tinged photographs of producer rick rubin, who has resurrected the careers of johnny cash, neil diamond, while giving weezer, justin timberlake, and slayer a new lease on life with his stripped-down aesthetic.

it's unclear whether metallica really needs that kind of shot in the arm, made even more ambiguous by the band's handiwork, showing the desecrated photographs of the balding bearded rock shaman with the eyes poked out that and the hand lettered slogan, "be organic," one of rubin's catch phrases. "how do we know that rick rubin is the right guy?" muses james. "we don't," he says simply. "he says he wants us to return to the "master of puppets" mind, but then everybody says that."

not due to actually enter a studio until after the first of the year, much could change. but then so much already has.

jaan uhelszki

SW: It's nice to see you, not looking too much worse for the wear of the past few years.
James Hetfield: I'm not sure about that. My kids tell me every day, 'Dad, your beard's gray now!' That's what happens.

SW: Happens when you have three kids? Or when trying to write a new album?
JH: Both.

SW: So what's changed the most in your life, or what has gotten you back to sanity? Is it great belief in something?
JH: I believe in everything, if it works. Anything that works, really. Which was the case when my wife and I renewed our marriage vows. It was quite a while ago. Our kids were there.

SW: How long have you been married now?
JH: Nine years. So I guess three years ago we renewed our vows.

SW: Right after you got out of rehab, right?
JH: No, it took a little while after that. She's a smart woman, so she wasn't going to jump back into anything she just got kind of wiped off from. Our kids were there, and we had some good friends there, and they came to us and said, 'Do you know? This is the first time in our lifetime, the only time in our lifetime that certain planets were aligned.' It was like, really? And it was at that exact day. Totally out of the blue.

SW: Well it must have been a good omen, because you're still married. That's very sweet that you did that.
JH: Yeah, it was very cool.

SW: You two seem so good together.
JH: Yeah, it's good. I know it's good. But we're very opposite. And the kids are a lot of fun. They're four, six and eight.

SW: I understand you began working on this new album around the time that you opened up for the Rolling Stones. I remember seeing a photo of all of you posing with the stones, and you had your hand on Mick Jagger's shoulder. What was that like?
JH: He gave me a funny look. It was like, 'Who are these people and why are they here?' It was an odd experience anyway. I can say that Keith Richards is very nice. In every interview or anything I've seen of him is just, it's fun, and it seems, not loose in a fucked-up way, but in more of a fun way. It seems like you could be very creative with someone like that. And I don't know how you could get creative with the vibe I got from Mick.

SW: I've met him a couple of times, and he seems so iconic...
JH: Well, the whole rock royalty thing is just odd.

SW: That's not something anyone would accuse you of. You really have never put on airs, you are almost the same thing offstage as onstage, you know?
JH: Well, I'm trying to get there. Trying.

SW: You seem really comfortable in being who you are.
JH: Well, that's the key to happiness, really. And you think being someone else that the grass is always greener, and then ending up being yourself truly is. That really is the only way to be. Sometimes it's really—well, I guess sometimes I do it in more covert ways. I'd rather hang out with a bunch of people and I'd rather be the bigger fish in the little pond. So that part I know is a little manipulative, even though I just gravitate towards it. I feel better being that person. And when I'm in a group of Mick Jaggers I go the opposite way.

SW: Well, I think you're that strange combination, extrovert and introvert, you know? Because you go inside so much but you have that big personality. But I also think that is at the core of why Metallica

are such a good band, because your introspection is there too, and you really examine who you are rather than just bust around like some pirate, which you could absolutely do, you know?
JH: Yeah, well, pirates, I love that word. That sense, doing what you want without stepping on people. I mean, like going into a restaurant, and I have friends that will do it. They'll go up, slip a $20 and say 'Get us a table' and I couldn't do that. It's embarrassing. Really embarrassing, but I'd like them to do it because I want to have the good table, you know?

SW: Okay, like let's say you were an artist, a successful graphic artist, could you do that and slip somebody a $20? It's just not in your character, right?
JH: No it's not. There's a part of me that feels embarrassed.

SW: But Lars is never lost, he's the type of guy who doesn't even have to slip anyone a $20, he just gets the best table. But he definitely balances out your reluctance. You two together are the perfect person. Okay, imperfect person. But there is a Mick Jagger/Keith Richards element to your relationship. Almost a competitiveness.
JH: Almost? Extreme. Yeah, that sums it up.

SW: But I always think that a lot of your better songs came out of the collision of the two of you.
JH: We know that. We discovered that. And no matter what, because you know, when you talked about Mick and Keith, I think Lars and I switch roles all the time. We go back and forth. And it depends on our mood because we read each other's mood like that. Even though we don't want to. We don't hop on the same thing a lot and go. We play tug of war, all the time.

SW: Lars always polarizes people. Like you cannot go into a situation with Lars without him making you take a stand...
JH: I know. Well, that's where he got the nickname Dr. No. The "no!" Because I had to have a stand, too.

SW: He gets spikey.
JH: Spikey. Spikey.

SW: But in social situations, he's very very smooth.
JH: Oh, he's a great charmer. There's no doubt.

SW: The last time when you were writing "St. Anger," you were doing so in a collaborative way, where everyone would sit around and just out their ideas and you'd weave them together and create the songs. Are you using that same technique or are you just back to your cave and writing alone?
JH: Well, we haven't talked much about that so there hasn't been the openness of it all, like last time. And I think because that was an introduced factor—by Phil Towle—we just went for it. And now it makes more sense to me that I come in and say: 'Here, I've got this idea for this.' That seems more natural to me. I don't mind doing the other thing, but since we're not doing it, maybe it's not as natural as we thought.

SW: Well, I think there's a part of you that's really a loner anyway. But whatever state you were in before—after getting out of rehab—that process helped you to get the album written. Now, you're not in that state of mind anymore, and so you're back to what's probably your more natural state as kind of a lone wolf. A lone wolf who comes back into the pack.
JH: Well, it was also a great experience too, because the way I am, I always think there's a better way, or an easier way. And the easier way doesn't mean better. So to actually try that was fun and feeling like a group, and it was really collaborative. All of us felt like we were in recovery together at the same time, and it was great. It might have taken the really huggy thing to have pulled me into the middle more. But I don't find it necessary for us to be in each other's shit all the time, or to know everything about each other, or to feel the vibe or hug every single time. I feel it more now, but it doesn't have to happen.

SW: Well, you don't want to force it. Just the key thing to therapy is to know when to stop. You know, you probably don't need that anymore. You've rebuilt your inner resources. I really think the growth happens when you break down. Because of that, I thought "St. Anger" was so revelatory because it showed the inner man and you don't have to do that anymore because you already did it.
JH: Right.

SW: I suspect the other side's probably going back to the old methods. Do you think that Metallica is born of anger? And where does that anger come from?
JH: What makes that anger? Fear, and what's under the fear? I mean insecurity or something. It's not just anger. That's on the surface. If you read under it all, there's a lot of other stuff, and everyone takes it for what they need it for. I'm realizing that so much more these days, that even in politics, which drive me nuts, it makes total sense that certain people are Democrats, certain people are Republicans, certain people are this—because it's their character. And it is as simple as that. And thank God there's all of those options. And the same with music. You know, you can take the anger at the surface and feel a part of it, or with more of a deeper thinker, go under it all and it's a little bit more work to do that, but some people are just that way.

SW: I think that you've liberated people from thinking it's terrible to be afraid of something, to face your fears, you know? There's something of that in the things you do for recreation. The hunting. The Harley.
JH: And a lot of that was a shield. No doubt, no doubt. Because I realize, you know, hunting is pretty much off my priority list. And motorcycle riding too. It's fun to get out in the wind every once in a while on my own, but just riding around in traffic showing off on a bike is dangerous to me. Other things are more important, that's all.

SW: Like having kids, has that changed the things that you write about or think about? They say novelists write the same theme... are you still moved by the same things that you were when you first started Metallica?
JH: Topic-wise, musically, not so much. I mean if there's something that's just noisy, baaah, you know, that would have been maybe a little more fun.

SW: It's more like a young man's game, and people don't do that long. Bands who do that early, you have to morph or they break up, you know?
JH: Right. And there are bands that get it, you know? That are career bands. Not on purpose, it's just the way it is. Green Day is one of those too, that kind of, they've made the next step. And I think that we certainly have, and we're still stepping. We're still going. I think probably the thing that sticks with me most about our encounters with Phil, the one thing he said was 'What we're doing here is not for this album. It's for the next one.' Wow, that is so evident now. I mean that's a pretty safe statement, too.

SW: You mean, he might have been more secure of keeping his job with you, if he hadn't said that?
JH: Right. Very true. So whatever happens, you know, it's the result of the work we did before. And that secured a place in our past for him, if not one in our future. And I know it had to end anyway. But now it feels okay, I'm more comfortable going back in the cave. Or I feel more confident coming in with these words and if you don't like 'em then that makes sense. We're different people. I'll go back and try and rework 'em and make them more vague so it all kind of fits in, you know. Which, you know, vagueness to me is always more intriguing at times. You know, you have to dig. I think that maybe "St. Anger" was too specific to what was happening in my life.

SW: So the greatest benefit of working with Phil Towle was that anybody could have their say, and no one would take it personally?

> I want to move forward, I want to think about what we're going to do on *the next album*. Lars has got twenty demo versions of one of the songs up there, and he's fixated with finding the best version. I'm like, *'just shred it,'* I'm done. What's the newest one?' I just want that one.

JH: That's a pretty big part of it. And now I notice, you know, now that Phil's gone and all of the big meetings and the things are done, not that we've slipped back into our old habits but we've taken our roles as they feel comfortable. You know, sitting there asking Kirk, 'What is your opinion about that right now?' without Lars and I saying a word, it's difficult. And it's fine.

SW: Did you feel more confrontational prior to what you went through? Would you say that to Kirk now? Like you needed the information right then and demanded it, and now you have more empathy or compassion?

JH: I think it was more like us telling Kirk, 'You kind of step up and be a part of it. You have to be more on the driving team instead of the backseat team.' But he doesn't really have to be. We all don't fit in the front seat. And it seemed like a lot of his blossoming, or his I guess just shining, was focused around 'You have to step up and get out of your thing.'

SW: Could you ever see yourself going back and working with someone like Phil again?

JH: Oh, I could never see going back and I don't miss those times. But that's kind of my personality anyway. I want to move forward. I want to think about what we're going to do on the next album. Lars has got 20 demo versions of one of the songs up there, and he's fixated with finding the best version. I'm like, 'Just shred it, I'm done. What's the newest one?' I just want that one.

SW: If I was forced to listen to 17 discs I think I'd stop being able to tell the difference between them. I always think the next one is the best one.

JH: Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. Oh, man. Fifteen CD tapes. I mean 15 CDs with sometimes 40, 60 IDs on it? Fifteen of those, and I listened to 'em all, made my marks, and okay. And Lars, sweeping them again and again. 'Yeah, but we did very good on that one.' But I only want something that hits me right then, that's it, it's the best. Why fuck around with all the other stuff? We know we can make good songs out of any riff we have. But it's that one riff that's just above everything, it's like the beacon. That's the riff. And taking that, because it's shining in your face and you hear it. Just take those.

SW: So it doesn't matter what's on these archival tapes. It's like what you feel in the moment... but having said that, what's going to be different about this album? Robert Trujillo said that you plan to go back to your past, go back to "Master of Puppets." Can you do that and pick up that thread? Where is this album going for you, is it taking what's good from the past and bringing it in the future?

JH: Yes. A little bit. When Rick Rubin came in and met with us, he said '"Master Of Puppets."' I just thought, 'Oh, God. Okay. Yeah.' First of all, everyone says that. Fans say 'That's the last album that they were kings. That was it. They died after that,' or something. We didn't have a 20 year anniversary of "Ride The Lightning," we probably won't have the big 20 year anniversary of "...And Justice For All." "...Puppets" was kind of this miracle album. But having said that, okay, what has Rick Rubin done lately? You know, okay, Johnny Cash, Neil Diamond, some of them are people that may have gone through a lot of stuff in their career and have forgotten about what made them good at a certain time. He's good at telling them, 'Hey, go back.' So was that too easy? You know, 'Go back to the "...Puppets" era. That's when things were great.' Well, they're great now. I feel great writing stuff but okay, what does he really mean by that? I'm not going to write songs that sound like "Master Of Puppets." We try and do certain things and they always come out as something that we're proud of. They always do. And that's great. That's a confidence builder. So okay, the feelings we were having when we wrote "...Puppets," I mean we're not going to all go live in the same house together again, we're not going to get in a bus and drive around. What does Rick Rubin mean when he says that? What things were inspiring us? Where was our motivation, things like that? It's tough. It's tough to go back then, and access those feelings. I'm not certain we have to...

SW: And you weren't faking the bravado of "Master of Puppets."
JH: Yeah. Well, first of all it would be impossible to fake it. We could not do that. It wouldn't feel right, and I just, I wouldn't. As an exploring musician, I want to go forward.

SW: But you were still in the act of inventing Metallica when you wrote that.
JH: Right. Well, we had a goal, but we'd never seen it. We'd seen it in other people but we didn't know what it really felt like, what it was going to be like. So if our goal is to go backwards and feel the way we did and we can't get there, then we've failed at the mission in a way. We never could have failed reaching for world domination. At that stage, having a tour bus was world domination to us. And we did that, we did it. So going backwards to those feelings is kind of tough. The other thing Rick Rubin said, that makes a lot more sense to me, was, 'You're making a demo. This is your first demo, and you have to put the best stuff on there. You're out to impress. You're out to impress whatever it is, the record company, the audience, the something. You're out to impress these people with your best, best stuff.' And that makes more sense to me, that we believe that we're making demos. Here's your showcase, and you're building a set list to go play this showcase. That, I can sink my teeth into.

SW: If you think that, what do you still have to prove creatively? Or if there's a new mission, what's the new mission?
JH: I think that that statement by him brought up something for us. 'Wow, we've done that, but why are we not still doing that?' And now we are. We want to be the best that we can be, because we're pretty tough on ourselves. But I think there's a feeling that maybe we've been a little lax when we're at home, we're comfy.

SW: Think how miserable you would be if you didn't continue to go forward creatively, I think you'd die inside.
JH: Yeah. No, I would be writing, no matter what.

SW: So what do you think the next stage in your development will be?
JH: When I hear something fresh, I don't know why or what it is. Is it the band's attitude? Is it where they're living? Is it where they're coming from? Are they all on the same page together? What is it, like a band like the Sword, something that has some freshness to them, where you just hear that riff and you go, 'Whoa, that is new.' Even though it's got the tune down, it's got the same stuff, something is new in that. That's what I want to do. I think we've got some songs that have that, and they came up in the moment. And it's weird, it's almost embarrassing to be out in the studio and 'Lars, just play a beat. We need something in this beat area.' And he'll say, 'Well, how about a riff more like this or this,' and he'll try to talk it through. It's like 'Stop! Let's just write something!' And then he'll do this beat, and the riff will come up, the first thing. And he'll stop and go, in a word he'll say 'That's amazing. How do you do it?' And it's almost embarrassing to hear that, because it's like I'm not doing it. We're doing it! I couldn't have done it if you didn't play that beat, and in a way it's very humbling, you know.

SW: Well, it's that synergy between you two. He's all head, and you're all heart. Together you make the perfect man.
JH: Oh, yikes. But yeah, maybe. Imperfect man, maybe.

SW: Together you become more balanced, you know? If you can restrain that over-thinking of him, the music just takes off. Sometimes you can almost feel him thinking 'Did I unplug the iron?' or something, he's just not in the moment.
JH: Oh, God. That is why, and you made me realize it because when he's not into it, when he's not focused on the gig, or like, when he's bored with touring, it's not in his heart. It's in his head.

SW: When you were talking about it in that moment, I could see the evolution of that happening, him playing the beat and then it going to a whole different place. I wonder what's going on with him that's allowing him to listen right now. I mean I think that's what's key. To me that's how it could be actually a new paradigm, that you could actually be almost a new band. Plus Robert Trujillo is not really the new guy. You're not working with Bob Rock. Rick Rubin is the new guy, you know? It's like you've chosen all these things to

mix it up. You've put yourself in a climate of discomfort, because you've thrown out everything that's known. You've already done the Phil Towle experiment. That put you in a new comfort zone, but forget that, you decided to even shake it up further, and to go with a guy like Rick Rubin, who's rather hands-off.
JH: Very hands-off.

SW: So you're working with a net, but you're working without a net, too. It's no accident you chose this guy.
JH: Very true. It was tough at the beginning, because there was no Bob Rock, 'Okay, today we have, the schedule is this, this, this.' And we were kind of used to that. And then we kind of come in and it's like, 'Okay, guys, we're going to start at 9 a.m.' At 10:30 a.m., people are rolling in, and you know, 'Oh, I had this and that to do.' It's like just, 'Can you call?' And then

I felt like, okay, I'm the dad here, you know, that's trying to organize every, organize our schedules. And that didn't feel good. Because I'd bring it into here, and then I'm more stiff. And I don't want to be stiff, I want to be, like you said, the heart guy who just feels it. And a lot of times there's resistance, you know, there's that resistance. Okay. It's like going to court or something. If I was to get on Lars about being late, you know, I was five minutes late that one day. How dare you say I'm late, you were late. And it's like, okay, I don't want to play that game. Let's just try and show up on time, and get creative together. And if I'm in here a little stiff, then the whole thing feels stiff. I think Lars is opening up more. There's lots of, there were jarring, traumatic things in his life. The divorce. Very, very huge, and has affected him a lot. And he's got a new woman in his life who's amazing.

SW: Connie Nielsen, the actress?
JH: Yeah. She's helped him step up, completely. With his kids, with structure, discipline, things like that. But also I think because he sees the freedom in discipline or the freedom in structure. He's got five cell phones and he loses them and it's frustrating to see. But he's starting to get more organized in his own self, so that I think has given him more confidence to be free with it. I also think management just said, 'Guys, let's let the creative people do their creative thing, you know? Let's not work it so much by the numbers. The numbers are great, after the creative part. You know, the riff comes out. Here it is, okay, it goes from here-here-here-here. And then Lars will sit and go, 'What if you did this like and put that one there?' You know, he'll actually come up and point onto my fret board and be absolutely right. I'll go, 'Wow. I never would have played it that way,' just because I've been playing for 20 years, or 30 years. And then I'll play it, and then I go, 'Well, there it is. There's the fresh sounding riff,' you know? So it is a great combination of heart and math, you know.

SW: I think the thing is, it's like if you come in and you're reinforcing the good in him, and you're not getting that bad personality, then he becomes more good. It's like you have to mindfuck him, you know? Lars is so keen that if he thinks he's being worked at all then you're in this whole level. So many byzantine levels. But the best thing you guys can do is throw away those old scripts, you know?
JH: Yeah. It's somewhat tough. But Rob, like you say, Rob'll come in and he'll be positive about everything, which really helps. But you know, we can't have 200 songs because Rob will just go, 'It's awesome!' You know, and he'll be in it, and contributing, and jumping all over it.

SW: Yeah, he's like working 'til two in the morning because it's new to him.
JH: Oh, man. Well, that's another subject, if he's trying to avoid things, who knows, but he likes hanging out here.

SW: That's so true. You don't know.
JH: Well, he's got young kids and I think that's scary. I think it's a little bit the scary part for him, hanging out.

SW: I do think that he does have a lot of that workaholism that is unusual in a 41-year-old.
JH: Well, I know Lars does that too, but he's very, he's realized it… (Laughs) You're sitting exactly where Lars always sits, so it's funny to be talking to you about him, sitting there… He's not hanging out 'til two in the morning. And I was the only one saying 'We can't do that anymore,' but now I think he gets it. He understands it, so it's great that Lars and I are at least on the same page as far as schedule and priorities with kids and stuff.

SW: He has two children, right? And Kirk just gave birth. That is wild. Oh, yeah, there's the baby right there. So working around all the children stuff, and with Kirk gone for the last five weeks, how's the writing going?
JH: Well, the writing is going great. It's tough when all four of us are here sometimes. I think the more we sit back, we realize each other's personalities and we're a lot more comfortable with them. Instead of trying to be the New World Order or the one governing world, like Phil seemed to kind of want to insinuate—

SW: That it was one world order?
JH: Yeah. We're all equal. You know. You should write lyrics. You know, Lars, you should play guitar. You know, you should be able to do everything you want. And that's okay, to feel free. But okay, this is not my only role and I better protect it, but it's more like, 'I can do this. This is great, but I'd rather just be here, and that's okay.'

SW: Yeah. But it's back to that reverting back to your true forms, you know? Like that was your break because maybe you just needed the perspective to see that you could do all these other things.
JH: I don't want to go to the party. I just want to be invited. You know. Exactly. And I feel better about it. I feel included but don't have to go. So

> The thing Rick Rubin said, that makes a lot more sense to me, was, "You're making *a demo*. This is your first demo, and you have to put the best stuff on there. You're out to impress. You're out to impress whatever it is, the record company, the audience, the something. *You're out to impress* these people with your best, best stuff." And that makes more sense to me, that we believe that we're making demos. Here's your showcase, and you're building a set list to go play this showcase. That, I can *sink my teeth* into.

I think that's what's happening here, and Kirk tends to really kind of go off. And I love that part about him but when you're trying to be creative, it doesn't seem focused so much—well, I don't want to say focused because you know, when you're out there, you think he'd say, he doesn't have the personality of 'Guys, I got it! Check this out! Follow me into—' this crazy space. So he doesn't have the initiating personality, but he's already out there, and no one can follow him because he hasn't said 'Please follow me,' you know? So when we're out there jamming, instead of him maybe being in his mind figuring out the part that he could do, he's trying to learn what we're doing and being way behind. And it almost pulls us back, because wow, we're already into the third chorus here and we're still working on the transition from the intro on, you know, with him. So sometimes his personality in the group creatively, it seems like it drags a little bit.

SW: But he's always been that way. He's kind of a lone wolf, himself.
JH: But I think we're realizing it more. But just realizing that, okay, that's part of the struggle in life. That's fine. No, it's fine, because all of us, we're open about it. It's like, 'Kirk, where are you?' You know. And we'll say that, we'll tell him. 'You know, sometimes it's easier to work when you're not here, on the initial stuff. But you know, when you come in we'll show you the song, we'll get this thing going, and he's very needed.'

SW: Well, maybe you just have to be aggressive and just let him be passive, you know? Maybe he's just one of those guys that just needs to be told what to do.
JH: And that's fine. Yes. He is. But he'll always be there. He's got that Rob part where, you know, 'I'm there.' And we'll see how it goes with the kids now in his life, but 'I want to tour. I'll go.' And I'm the one going, 'Nah, nah.' But he's always available, always wanting to do it if it has to do with the band. And he wants to be there. So that shows me that it's not a lack of interest. You know, he hasn't given up on Metallica, he hasn't lost it or doesn't care about it. He does. It's just his personality is so much different from mine and Lars'.

SW: I think the key is not resenting him for being him. And then taking that and giving him a little more direction. That doesn't demean his contribution. It's just the way you deal with him.
JH: I'm in a car club called the Beatniks. And there's these guys that are, well, we've got the West Coast Beatniks and the East Coast. The East Coast guys, they come in and they're like loud and aggressive and belligerent. They'll say things to your face that you go, 'Whoa, okay.' Well, okay. You know, okay. But they're like that. I'm attracted to that style of management. You know, it's like growing up in a neighborhood where, okay, there's Spanky, there's Sneezy, there's—you know, why do you call 'em that? Well, because it's his personality. And we're not secretive about it. He knows it because we tell him that.

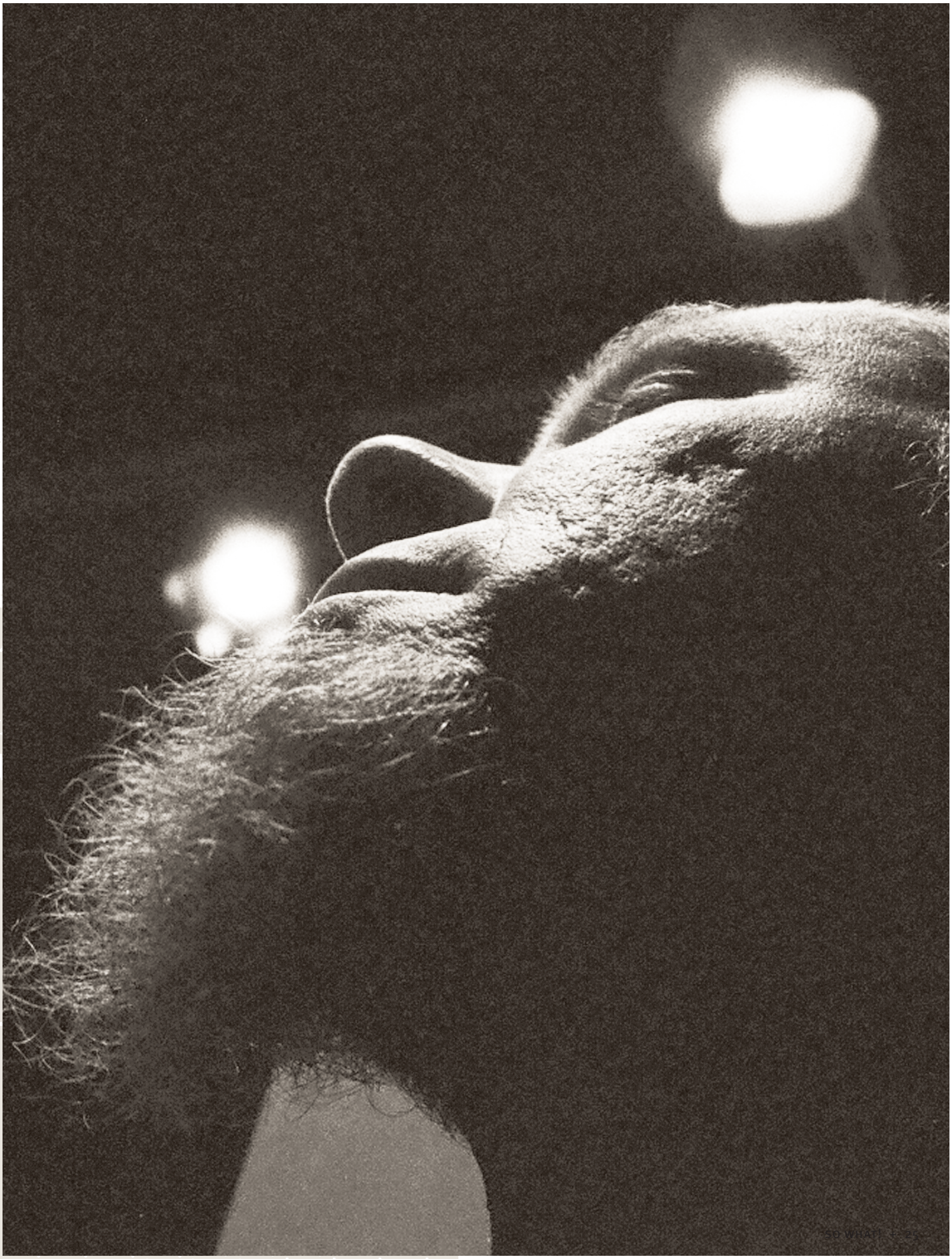
SW: Yeah, right. It's true. And I don't think he's self-deluded, either.
JH: And that's kind of the West Coast personality, it's like 'Oh, just let him be.' And we'll hold some little resentments. We won't confront him. But man, as soon as you say, 'Dude, where the fuck are you, you know? You're sitting there reading a magazine and we're listening to these riffs. C'mon, join the project.' And then, yeah. And the more we say that, the more it's okay.

SW: Switching gears, how does it feel to have these new metal bands like Trivium and the Sword nipping at your heels, you know? Does it push you?
JH: That was pretty key in doing our summer tour stuff. We were playing gigs with Trivium, and Kirk and Lars get into this funny banter where 'We're just all old' and you know, that guitar player's way faster—to each other. And of course they say it loud enough where everyone hears it. They're degrading themselves, and how old and slow they are—but again being the Metallica, sarcasm with meaning. It's like, guys, I hear you going back and forth with that, but what do you really feel? Do you feel old? Well, let's fucking get out there and rehearse the shit out our stuff. We went to rehearse so much, and we were so tight and so good and we went out and played. The tempos were awesome. After every show people were going 'What the fuck did you guys do? That's the best I've ever heard you sound.' And, well, that scared me. First of all it means we have to rehearse more, which we don't like doing. But the main thing was the focus. I kind of stepped up at the rehearsal saying 'stop.' I stopped in the middle of a song, 'That's sloppy. What's going on?' And people were going, 'What do you mean?' And I sat down with Kirk and 'Oh, you mean the riff's this way?' Like you've been playing the riff different for 10 years maybe?

SW: I think if you can re-assume that dominant position in the band, and let everybody know that this is for the good of all. Because why would you settle for something that's not excellent, when there are bands nipping at your heels? A whole generation of bands that wants to be you?
JH: I can't assume that position because, you know, there's still residuals of shame, 'I fucked up,' you know.

SW: But you've admitted that you had a problem and then went on. The only kind of bad thing is you filmed it. I have to say I can't bring myself to watch "some kind of Monster."
JH: I can't either. It was on TV last night, and I went 'Aahh!'

SW: I think one of the key pieces in this creative rebirth is the exit of Jason and all the resentment that he felt.
JH: I agree. And the longer he's gone, the more we don't remember him, and that's okay. Every once in a while you hear music coming up, and it's like, 'Wow, that was Jason. Huh.' And I'm always... the guy was in the band for 20 years and he seems like he was never really at home. I'll watch stuff on TV, the history of metal, and they're talking about Ozzy Osborne and Rob's picture will pop up. And the guy narrating will say 'Robert Trujillo, Metallica,' and I'll go, 'Fuck yeah!' You know? I get so excited that yeah, he's in our band.



SPUNDO

The last thing anyone expects from Lars Ulrich is that he'll be early. But there he is, standing in front of the Tasmanian devil-like painting that says 'Born Psycho' in the hallway of Metallica's HQ, looking anything but psycho. It's only 8:30 a.m, I'm on time and he's waiting for me, checking emails on his PDA, and looking, well, a little impatient. And people say there's no such thing as karma.

Just to get things in perspective, it's the rare rock star that really is where he says he'll be at a designated hour. And Lars was no exception—no, Lars made the rule. But to be fair, the longest I've ever waited to interview him might have been a little over two hours, sometimes it's been a half hour, but over the past ten years, I can easily say, he has never been on time. Until now. Blame it on the kids, because according to Lars, he's been up since near dawn, dropped his two kids off at school, and had a conversation with a soccer mom about some fine point in "some kind of monster," and all that was before 8:00 a.m.

Lars Ulrich

SO WHAT! interview

"I've been up since 6:45 a.m. I've had my kids through the whole morning routine, dropped them off at school, caught up on a couple of phone calls. Then at 1:45 p.m. I've got to take Layne to a swim lesson and then I've got to pick the other son, Myles, up, and then there's a play date at 4:30 p.m. and homework. And so in between all that we get some time to write the greatest heavy metal album we've ever written."

Being punctual isn't the only thing that has changed in the two years or so that I've seen Lars Ulrich. He's been through a divorce, he's in a relationship with actress Connie Nielsen, is a single parent, has recently finished making a film, is embarking on recording a new album, yet there is a lightness about him—both in terms of body mass and spirit—and a rededication to stepping into the unknown without needing to control it. "I think my greatest strength is my openness," says Ulrich and really meaning it.

Especially now, since Metallica don't know exactly when, or where, they're recording this new album, or who will engineer it, they only know with whom. That would be Rick Rubin, the august producer who Esquire Magazine heralded in their April 2006 issue, after presenting him one of their coveted Esky Awards: "In four words we trust: produced by Rick Rubin."

The only trouble is that Rick Rubin is simultaneously producing five other major acts this year—Linkin Park, Velvet Revolver, another posthumous Johnny Cash album, the International Noise Conspiracy and U2. He's currently in Dublin with the Irish superstars, while Metallica keep to a regimented schedule demo-ing songs for their yet-untitled tenth studio album. Today they're due to work on number 22 and Lars doesn't seem to be bothered one bit that Rubin isn't here advising them, overseeing, or even moving to Northern California. But then again, there are all the desecrated photos of Rubin keeping not-so careful watch. As if this band needs any watching. There is perhaps no band in the world that knows their own minds the way Metallica does.

"I know that Rick Rubin is the guy that comes in the twilight of your career, and gives you the last shot. I don't think that's where we are," says Lars firmly, yet without a trace of defensiveness.

More they liked his work with System of a Down, Audioslave, Slipknot, and Johnny Cash, so they decided to call him up to "hang out with them," according to Lars. After a single dinner at Sausalito's restaurant Fish, they knew he was the man they wanted at the boards without spending a single moment in the studio with him. "It was a decision that was made like most of our decisions are, quickly, organically, and with not much caution or thought," laughs Lars.

It wasn't that they were displeased with Bob Rock, whom they had worked with for approximately the past 15 years, it was just they really wanted a change. something to shake everything up.

"We wanted to bring in a different dynamic, and after five records with Bob, it was obvious that Rick was the guy. So it was really that simple," insists Lars.

Despite the swarm of Metallica-inspired bands like Trivium and The Sword, he seems comfortable that Metallica can resume their place in the testosterone-fueled hard rock scene, despite what he calls "The St. Anger experiment," a disc that perhaps was the real "Binge & Purge." But that metaphoric purge turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to them, and with the addition of Robert Trujillo, and their recent tour to celebrate the 20th anniversary of "Master of Puppets," this is a band who are ready to resume their hegemony of arenas and the airwaves. Hell, they've even entered the modern age, and are offering their stuff on i-Tunes.

Looking rather like a John Varvatos model, in his dark jeans, and black clogs, (that you'd think would betray his Danish heritage, but instead make him look fashion forward) Ulrich picks up his state-of-the art PDA and walks to the door. "Time is up," he says, as if hearing some distant alarm that no one else can discern. He walks to the door, restlessly fingering his necklace of bone on a leather strap, re-adjusts the black baseball cap far back on his head, scratches at his well-kempt but subtle facial hair, his mind already in a thousand other places. But before he opens the door to the raw Marin morning, he says, "Our greatest strength might just be that we're the best looking band in rock."

Jaan Uhelszki

so what!: when did you officially start recording this album?
Lars Ulrich: Well, that would be, you can't ask that question in the past tense because it hasn't happened yet.

sw: oh, that's right. so you're demo-ing?
LU: You know, where it gets a little gray is because we're writing where we record, and where we have recorded, which is the first time we've ever done that. But what we are doing is, this is the 2006 version of what we did in the '80s and '90s, which is basically that first of all we get together and we go through the riff tapes, which are the riff CDs. And then we sit around and sort of put songs together out of all the ideas and stuff that surfaced in the last three years, basically. And we're just coming up, as of today's date, we're working on the 22nd song. And I think we've got three to go, maybe four, and then hopefully we should be recording sometime after New Year's or in the early spring. But it's pretty close to what we used to do, which is get together, go through all the material from the previous year or two, and then put those together in demo form. It's difficult to call this a demo studio, obviously, when you look at it, but I think to a lot of people, because we're working in the same place where we did the whole "St. Anger" experiment, people are kind of assuming that we're recording. But we started sometime after the Rolling Stones shows, probably in December of 2005 and it's not that it's taking such a long time… let's see, how to articulate this… It's not that it's going slower. We're putting probably the same amount of time into it, it's just spread out, because the days of the twelve-hour days in the studio, fourteen-hour days, all that type of stuff, it just is not a reality anymore. I've been up since 6:45 a.m. I've had my kids through the whole morning routine, dropped them off at school, caught up on a couple phone calls. Then at 1:45 p.m. I've got to take Layne to a swim lesson and then I've got to pick the other son, Myles, up, and then there's a play date at 4:30 p.m. and homework. And so in between all that we get some time to write the greatest heavy metal album we've ever written. But there's just less hours in the day to do it than there was when I was 26 years old and I put in the twelve-hour days. So it's probably taking about the same amount of time, it's just spread out over a longer period, you know?

sw: i found that when i had my kid that i became really good at compacting my day and becoming much more efficient.
LU: Yeah, I would say there's a degree of that. I was just talking to a mom down at school at drop-off this morning. You know, I have to remind myself that the last thing that anybody saw of Metallica was the movie. That people still kind of carry this perception around that it's still like that, and so getting back to your comment about efficiency, it's not like that. And so we come in and we say our hello's, and we get straight into it without having to check in with everybody's feelings for an hour and all that kind of shit. And so everybody's getting along so well now all the energy goes into creating the music. We don't have to spend a lot of time on all the second level stuff, the outside stuff.

sw: last time i interviewed everyone was about "st. anger," and everyone was sitting at the kitchen table, throwing out ideas, and that would become the songs. you're not doing that anymore.
LU: I started realizing, and you have heard me refer to "St. Anger" as an experiment. Experiment is probably, that might be typecasting a little too much, but I really feet that now that we're back to working the way we made all the other records, which is basically we get together, we write songs. Me and James primarily push the things forward, with great help from both Robert and Kirk. But it is like it used to be, working off pre-existing ideas, getting together, shaping these things into songs and so on. "St. Anger" was an isolated experiment in that we wanted to try and not do that. We wanted to try and record the ideas as they materialized, and so

I'd like to think that we've been a *voice for the outsiders,* who realize that they didn't need to look to the exterior for something to *your own skin* that their roots are inside themselves instead of and your own bubble, with who you are, and not

we basically wrote out on the floor, and while we were writing it was being recorded, and then we assembled it. So it was an exercise in working in the moment and working with the energy of the moment, and trying to capture that, mostly because we felt that so much of our stuff in the past had been labored over too much. So it was a kind of an exercise in going to the other extreme, which was only about the moment. There was no labor involved in it. And I'm super proud that we did that. It was an interesting experiment also, then dealing with the wake of "Some Kind of Monster," and the film crew and Phil Towle, and James' situation and so on, but what we're doing now is very different from that. And there's no film crew, there's no Phil Towles, there's no funny sweaters.

SW: What was the best thing about making the movie?
LU: I think the great thing about the movie and why I'm really proud of it, is that it's very rare. I think that you have a documentary film that's lucky enough to have a natural dramatic arc to it. And that's why I think it worked so well, because there is, completely unbeknownst to us as we were going through the experience, a kind of a dramatic arc that's playing out. Everybody's doing this, getting along. Then this situation happens. Then there's the fall-out and that situation, then another situation happens. Then we have to deal with a new set of circumstances, and then there's like a happy ending, and there's a little bit of a villain... It's got all that. Just an hour ago, this mom I mentioned earlier was saying to me how amazing it is for people who don't really know that much about Metallica but who can relate to what we went through. But I can also understand how people that know so much about Metallica have trouble seeing us that way.

SW: That much exposure seems almost unnatural in your world? There's a little bit of losing the mystery, and I've always loved the mystery of Metallica.
LU: It's hard.

SW: Do you feel exposed out in the world sometimes?
LU: Well, it's a hard thing to navigate and I think it's a great thing to talk about, because as the world continues to get smaller and smaller and information travels and is readily available at the click of a button, and the whole celebrity culture gets exaggerated and all these things are happening, it's difficult because you want to keep a sense of the mystery, you want to not put everything out there. At the same time you also realize that certainly a big part of the reason that people enjoy this is because they feel close to us, and that we are accessible and we don't hide ourselves away, and they feel that they're on the same level as us and it's not them and us, or sort of like those kind of classic '70s relationships with the rock gods. And you know we spent so much of the '80s trying to get away from that and trying to make ourselves accessible, and in some way one could argue that a film and the web pages and the web reports and all that is sort of the 2006 version of making yourself as accessible as possible, and getting yourself as close to the fans as possible. But where do you draw the line? And that's a hard thing to navigate, and I can't say that I feel that at any point we have the right balance or the right answer. I think that we're certainly making ourselves less visible this time than we did the last time, but I also think there was an inherent need because we had gone through a cathartic experience that was unequalled in our history. I felt that because we'd been away for couple, three years, because we had the meltdowns and because there was all this perception of tension and uncertainty about the future, that maybe it was like a way to make up for that by inviting everybody in, and even though there were some difficult times at least they could see we were still somewhat functioning. So I think sometimes you can compensate.

SW: I know, it's like one of those things that you can't get from here to there. It's almost like you had to have this meltdown to get back to where you were.
LU: I think that Phil Towle, who took a lot of hits in the movie because he sort of is the token bad guy in the film—and you've gotta remember you sell two and a half hours of 1600 hours worth of footage and that's sort of the way it sort of ended up being portrayed out in this dramatic arc in the film—but one thing that he said which I think really has come true is that he insisted continuously through that process that the work we were doing at the time was not really for the benefit of that record, it was for the benefit of the next record. And that is 100 percent accurate. I really feel that as hard as those two years were, three years, that—and I'm not, you know me, I'm not a great subscriber to the kind of stuff—but there was a reason for all that bullshit.

SW: Yeah, you're much more pragmatic than that.
LU: Well, yeah, I try to be. But I do feel that all the work that we put into those two or three years really has manifested itself in probably the best

for the people that are looking for something to belong to, belong to, that they can look to the interior for something to grasp onto, having to go and attach them to somebody else's. it's about being *comfortable in* even maybe finding comfort in that but finding acceptance in that.

creative environment that I can remember us having for as long as my alcohol-soaked brain can remember. I mean it is a really great vibe at the moment and I think it is directly correlated to all that work we put into those couple years, and I don't think that what we have now would have been possible without all that tension, without all the extra work we put into getting through it.

SW: Did he become a villain because he didn't want to let go?
LU: Of course. Yeah.

SW: I mean for me, my perception of it is that he wanted to still be part of this...
LU: If he was sitting here now he would also acknowledge that that's the toughest thing for him. But you have to remember in his defense, you know, we collectively put—and I get a little leery when I hear myself use the word "work" too much, because it's like when you say the word "work" it's like you're clocking in and out. And we throw our whole lives into this, and have for the past 25 years, and the great thing about Phil, why it was such a match, was that he also threw his whole life into it. He wasn't just a guy, a psychiatrist, and then we came and clocked in for three hours and then he was on to the next case, and then he was on to the next case, and then—I mean he was there 24-7. Not just physically but mentally he was there giving everything he had at any given time, available, ready, jump in, ready to go. And so when you're like him and you give two years of your life at the level he gave, of course it's also difficult for him to, all of a sudden we say, 'Hey, we're cured. Bye. Nice working with you,' and then he gets kind of thrown out of this incredibly...

SW: Like in-crowd thing.
LU: Yes, but with all the troubles that we were having on so many different levels in our personal lives, and with all the different dynamics and so on, the safest place that any of us could be was in here with each other. It was sort of like the womb in a way, so like in this room, the five of us together, it was so safe. It was the safest place we knew in the world at that time. And so also for him, all of a sudden, now the door's just opened and it's time for you to leave. Because of the amount of work, the amount of energy and time and passion he put into it, so all of a sudden just be told, 'Okay, thank you.' Of course it's also difficult for him to let go, so I will always defend that side of him. There are a lot of balances. You know, if you're going to put a gazillion dollars into making this movie and so on, you also want the movie to work on many different levels, and you know, it was tough for Phil that he was sort of the token villain. And I think there are two elements in that. They were also slightly exaggerated, but nobody will ever really know the full story unless you had to sit through all 1600 hours and nobody in their right frame of mind would ever want to do that, you know.

SW: Did you believe in therapy before that or did it just seem like it was a great idea at the time?
LU: I can't say that I was a great believer in therapy. Then I think that one could argue that what we did was certainly not the traditional kind of therapy. We were ready for that kind of purging, and I think the best thing, probably the best thing for us about the whole thing was the fact that there was a comfort and a belief in ourselves and each other and the process enough to for the first time in our lives together, to be completely honest and completely open and never hide behind any half-truths or gray areas. So it was like a purging of stuff that had been built up for close to 20 years, and if the process we went through is called therapy then I believe in therapy, but I do believe that it's also a hit and miss type of thing, that it can work with the right combination of people and it can also not work with the wrong combination of people. But no, up 'til that point I wasn't a great believer in that and I'd also never slowed down long enough to actually even investigate what it really all meant. But I do think that we were very lucky in the fact that it was the right combination of personalities at the right time and they were ready to purge themselves.

SW: Is it easy to write? I mean sometimes you had writing blocks or it was hard to get started writing. Did he remove that kind of stuff, or do you have a greater belief in your talents and your gifts?
LU: That's a great question. What he did was he removed the fronts that we had with each other and the defense mechanisms and the egos that we came to the creative process with every day. You know, I've talked so much about the creative battle, and even James was talking about, the other day about maybe writing a song about what it used to be in terms of basically likely coming to the studio every day with our armor on and getting ready for the creative battles. And so there was so much other stuff that played a role in that. 'Wait, that's my idea. No, that's your idea. Wait. Well, I like that better because it's my idea.' And 'Wait, that's, wait, you know, you can't

tell me what to play and I can't tell you and I can't tell you what to sing.' And there were all these rules and all these kind of things, and I think that just got in the way. But of course the other side of that coin is that out of tension there can come some great things also, and obviously there was a fear on some of the people like, you know, [our manager] Peter Mensch or somebody like that who's lived his whole creative life around tension, he was very scared for instance that if that tension was going to get eroded or chiseled away, what would that mean? I find with life generally that every time you get dangerously close to having a particular thing that works for you, there's always another side of the coin that can work, too. I've said many times, it's like as I get older I see life and my life and everything increasingly in these grays, not just here on my cheeks [points to his beard] but these grays that sort of exist between the definitive black and whites that so many people subscribe to, and I find increasing comfort in just kind of moving forward in this in-between territory that's just all these kind of, not uncertainties but all these answers that maybe are not limited to just one. And so it's great not having the tension but you also want tension because then maybe the whole thing ends up too limp-fisted, limp-wristed.

SW: So with all this behind you, will you return to some older form of creation?
LU: To the "St. Anger" period or the pre-"St. Anger" time?

SW: The pre-"St. Anger."
LU: Yeah. It's still early but I also get weary because I don't want to be at a point in my creative endeavor where everything becomes about looking in the rear view mirror, and 'Oh, it used to be this and it used to be that, it used to be " Master of Puppets."' When you've been around as long as we have and people celebrating 20 years of this album and this accomplishment and all this type of stuff, once again it's a real fine line with the stuff about how do you balance the experiences that you've accumulated over the years with a sort of a forward-moving process? Which brings me to Rick Rubin. He's the guy that comes in the twilight of your career, and gives you the last shot. I don't think that's where we are.

SW: Working with him does have that stigma.
LU: Yeah, it's all that kind of shit. That's why I can't really speak about any of the stuff that we're doing now that definitively because it's still being molded. There was a song that we were working on, that was probably the first or the second thing we started working on in December of last year, and yesterday we just completely changed the verse around. So it's not like all these songs are written. Well, one through 22 are written, and it's a continuous process that will continue 'til the record is done, and it feels like it, at least the process is a little more in sync with what we used to do back in the day in terms of sitting down and listening to ideas, because with "St. Anger," everything that you hear in "St. Anger" was created out there by the four of us more or less in the moment that you hear on the record. Where most of the things we're working on now are ideas from the last three years that have accumulated on riff CDs and out of jam sessions and so on.

SW: But you know, they say novelists always write similar themes, what do you think that Metallica songs have been about?
LU: I'd like to think that we've been a voice for the—words like "alienated," come to mind, but they're so fucking black and white, but for people, you know, disenfranchised, alienated, for the outsiders, for the people that are looking for something to belong to, who realize that they didn't need to look to the exterior for something to belong to, that they can look to the interior for something to grasp onto, that their roots are inside themselves instead of having to go and attach them to somebody else's. It's about being comfortable in your own skin and your own bubble, with who you are, and not even maybe finding comfort in that but finding acceptance in that, or trying to either find a way to fit into something else without having to sell yourself. To me, these are the themes that have floated through most of the stuff that we've done, about people in situations. We used to write a lot in the third person. The earlier records were mostly in the third person, even if the "I" in the songs were mostly a fictional "I." And then what started happening in the '90s is that the "I" in the songs became probably more James and he got some much-needed confidence not just in his singing but in his lyric writing in the '90s through Bob [Rock], that he became more comfortable about opening himself up and writing less about, in third-person "I's" and more about himself. And now it feels like also maybe some of the stuff that we've been working on is coming back around to some of the third-person stuff again. It's still a little early, but I'd like to think that if there's been one underlying theme in most of the songs or the work as a collective, it is that you find your truth inside yourself and that truth is not anywhere else.

SW: But two reasons I've always thought why Metallica's so good, number one—
LU: Number one, is our good looks.

SW: Yes. Your good looks, and your great charm.
LU: Charming, you think? Charming personalities.

SW: Okay, you're a good-looking metal band, okay? I thought that went without saying, you know!!
LU: And?!!

SW: And... but other thing is that I think you're such a mirror for your fans. which isn't all that dissimilar to what you've said. I think you're a mirror for those people that didn't know where to look and felt like they were outsiders. I've always though of Metallica as the thinking man's metal band, so you offer an intellectual take on being disaffected. It's important to know you can

be an outsider but you still need a rock to hold onto, and you are that rock for so many people. why your band and not other bands, though? but really, there has to be a solid reason why metallica is still the biggest metal band in the culture.

LU: It's not like there's a fucking shortage of things to write about, it's just finding the right things. What's becoming hard for us, and I really want to make sure I say this in the right way because this can be misinterpreted I think, what's becoming hard for us is that we're very, very prolific. And we're pretty good at what we do. I mean James is like the most gifted guitarist I've ever seen and his ability is just, it's off the charts. And obviously Kirk and Rob and everybody, but James, he's so prolific and he's so gifted, and I mean this shit can just spew out of us to the point of ridiculousness. And we can take pretty much anything, we can take this and we can turn it

into that, or we can turn it into this, or we can make it fast, or we can make it slow, we can make it melodic, we can make it aggressive. It's like there's only, you know, "X" number of chords on a guitar, but then you put that pedal on it and it becomes more like this, and then you put something different on, or if he picks up this guitar instead of that guitar, and it becomes more like this. And we're so capable of doing that really pretty well that the hardest thing for us is basically trying to make it as lean as possible, to turn 26 songs into twelve. There are so many great riffs and so many great ideas and it's really hard for us to kind of find what the A-pluses are versus the A's or the A-minuses, because we feel that we can take an A-minus and if we work on it hard enough we can make the A-minus into an A or an A-plus. So how do you separate that stuff out, and I'm saying there's so much to write about, so many experiences. All of us are going through so much stuff on a continuous, almost daily basis that it's just about what makes that idea better than that idea? And that is a little bit what makes our heads spin. And you know, we do a Linda Blair sometimes and the head does a 360 and you kind of sit there and go, 'Fuck, you know, why is riff 212 better than riff 211 or 213?' I'd probably say that's the hardest thing for us, is to not necessarily self-edit but to pick what the very, very cream of the crop of these ideas are because, like I said, when you work with somebody like James, he can turn anything substandard into something great in like five minutes.

sw: that's amazing. and he makes it seem effortless, and he doesn't take much credit for the process. it's so crazy how self-effacing he is. i'm always struck by it every time i interview him.

LU: Yes. Very.

sw: has your drumming changed any over the years?

LU: I don't know. You know, it's funny, I always think of my drumming kind of as an afterthought. It's like I sit here, James sits here with his guitar, I sometimes have a pair of sticks in here, and most of what goes on, goes on right here. And so he sits there, I sit here, these ideas get thrown around and I would say that the places where my drumming has probably been the most affected in the last year was revisiting "Master Of Puppets" and playing "Master Of Puppets" 20 times this summer, which was a great thing, because it forced me to kind of step up a little bit and not just being in good physical shape but also being in good mental shape. And to play "Master Of Puppets" continuously for 45 minutes without stopping is definitely challenging. So I would say we've all been the fittest we've been in years. And I think that some of that strength has kind of spilled into what we're doing here. I'm starting to feel a little more spunky and I think I'm pushing myself a little more instead of just the drums being an afterthought to setting up the guitar riffs. So I'm finding that it's fun and challenging to try and do some more physically demanding things and some things that are a little more adventurous again. Because I've always gone back and forth between now it's really fun to push, now it's fun to kind of lay back, now it's fun to maybe just set up more of a groove and let the guitars be the main voice, and then there're some other places where it's really fun to play a drum solo through the verse. So I would say that it's a little spunkier than it has been for some years, and it's kind of fun. But it's also because I feel just a little more physically fit.

sw: you know the weird thing about thinness and fitness, it confers great power. but beyond you being in good shape you have some kind of calm that you never had and i think that serves you well as a person...

LU: Thank you.

sw: do you think it's a function of age?

LU: More a function of fatigue. I'm 42. It was Rob's birthday yesterday, and he turned 42, and we were talking about how awesome it is that we're all 42. And then I realized, well, Hetfield is actually 43 and fucking Kirk is going to be 44 next month. And when you're 44 you're almost halfway to 50, I mean fuck.

sw: forties are really good years because you get to be the boss. you know your own mind. speaking of which, was it hard not to have bob rock along for this record?

LU: Once again, I'll preface my answer with saying that we haven't really worked on the recording part of the record yet, I don't know, so ask me six months from now. The same things brought us to Rick Rubin that brought us to Bob Rock and I think it's important that people understand that. In 1990 we had made three records with Flemming and as much as we loved him, we also felt that we needed a different dynamic. And in 1990 Bob was making the best rock records at the time, between the Cult and the Mötley Crües and the David Lee Roths and whatever. He just made sonically, creatively the best records. End of story. We're going to try somebody different, let's try him. Fast forward to 2005. Rick Rubin. Between System and Audioslave and Slipknot and the Chili Peppers and Johnny Cash and everything else that covers the whole creative field, he makes the best rock records now. So when we realized that we needed to bring in a differ-

ent dynamic after 15 years and five records with Bob, it was obvious that Rick was the guy. So it was really that simple. And it was a decision that was made like most of our decisions are, quickly, organically, and with not much caution or thought. It was like, 'Hey, Rick, you want to come up and hang out?' He came up and we spent the day hanging out. And we went to restaurant Fish down in Sausalito, and we had some fish and we said, 'You want to make our next record with us?' He said yes, so it was like, 'Okay, good.' And that was really it. I've seen Bob a couple times, we speak once in a while, everything is fine. And at the same time, we have to remember that "St. Anger" once again was an isolated incident. He was really wearing three hats on that album. Number one, he was the producer, but he was also a co-songwriter and he was also the bass player, so he was involved in the process at every given minute. Up until "St. Anger," he was never really involved in the process until we were done writing the songs, just like now, where Rick has been up here half a dozen times and given his input and given us some guidelines and suggestions. But we haven't really done the trenches yet with Rick because we haven't started recording yet.

SW: What does he tell you, how did you set it up even though he hasn't been here recording? Does he say 'I envision you guys doing, this?'
LU: Rick's very organic in everything he does and he tries to make us think organic. And what I mean, organic, he tries to make us work by playing together instead of writing on the computer. He tries to make us feel it instead of think it. He is not a very technical kind of guy so he's trying to make us think more about how we used to create things without the aid of all these fancy buttons and all these blinking lights and all this stuff. He tries to encourage us to kind of have the same approach as we did when all that wasn't available to us. And those are some of the bigger picture kind of things. But he's much more kind of a bigger picture guy, much more about the process versus the specifics. It's not so much that drumbeat versus that drumbeat. He's more talking about like the tuning of the guitars, where James's vocal range is, where James' vocal range has the most energy, what guitar tunings sound better. Because over the course of the years we've moved so much around in the sonic, and different guitar tuning, so he's sort of like 'Try this versus that. If you do it this way, James' vocal has this kind of character, but if you do it in this tuning James' vocal has a different kind of character.'

SW: And he does that just from sitting in with you guys, or listening to the old Metallica records?
LU: Both, yeah. It's a combination of both. We'll sit there and go, 'Where are we recording?' He'll say, 'Don't worry about it, we'll figure that out when we get there.' 'When are we recording?' 'Don't worry about it, we'll know when the time is right.' 'Who's going to be the engineer?' 'Don't worry about it. Don't think so much about these pragmatic things, think more about keeping it real.' It's been quite good also for me because you know, I want to make sure everything is just right, and I tend to overthink and this and that, and he's brought a kind of a calmness. Obviously it helps not having twelve cameras around. Everything is very just chilled. He's very obviously different from the four of us but he's also very different from Bob. It so far has been a very different experience and will continue to be a very different experience, I have to tell you.

SW: Do you ever have dreams of Cliff (Burton)? That he's alive, or does he come to you in dreams?
LU: Not often, no.

SW: But does he ever show up?
LU: I don't believe that, there's no such word as never. I can't say that Cliff shows up in my dreams often, but I'm sure he does once in a while. But you know, I had this incredibly vivid dream last night about this snake that attaches itself to your finger. It basically, it latches onto your finger with its mouth and then you walk around with a snake on your finger for about a week. And then after about a week, the snake will then decide whether it will bite you, and then if it bites you, you die within a day, or whether it will let go. Try to figure that one out, because I'm just thinking about that one all morning.

SW: It's definitely a potency dream, so it just hung on?
LU: Yeah, it just hung there. It's like walking around with a snake in my finger that's basically like, just latched on like a leech, and then at some point around a week it'll decide whether to bite you and then kill you, or to let you go.

SW: Wow. You must be evaluating a lot of stuff, like ridding yourself of so much stuff. Can you compare the stuff that you're working on with any other moments in Metallica history? It doesn't feel like a continuation of "St. Anger?"
LU: That's one thing it's not.

SW: Does "St. Anger" seem like an aberration, almost?
LU: Um hum. I think "St. Anger" is a great record, but it's a very particular kind of record and it was very important for us to have that kind of experience and to make that kind of record, but the more I distance myself from it, I realize that it's a very isolated record that is a complete reflection of, maybe even more so than any other Metallica records, it's just a reflection of that moment in time. And you want all your records to obviously be, as corny as it sounds, a Polaroid of that moment or that experience or whatever, but "St. Anger" really was that moment. And it was very important for us to have that moment and to experience that moment and to feel comfortable in that moment, but what we're doing now is certainly not that. And I think that increasingly history will probably dictate that "St. Anger" will always be an experiment. I guess 'experiment' almost has a negative connotation, but just sort of like a necessary experience that was the result of most of the stuff that happened around us at the time.

SW: But you know what's bizarre, I think the difference is that the albums are always a reflection of the time, like they capture the zeitgeist. And this was a personal zeitgeist. It was like this captured your personal history, where the other records create the history of all the people. When you talk about the fans, you capture their history in those moments, and this was so much more personal and insular.
LU: Capturing our disaffectedness or something.

SW: But I think the other albums are like bigger statements, are bigger canvasses.
LU: I'll agree with that.

SW: Tell me about Robert? How does he fit in with the dynamics, and the writing dynamics?
LU: It's awesome. Every day I'm thankful that he's here. I don't use the word perfect very much, I don't believe in perfection, but he is as close to perfect as I'll use that adjective. His dynamic and his personality just fit in so well, and that's also a big part of the reason that there's such a calm energy in this band in the moment. I think he not just brings it, but he also brings it out in the rest of us. And he has been, I'd say pretty much the constant with me and James, so he's sort of like this kind of third wheel, and I will use the third wheel expression in every positive way of like between mine and James' dynamic, he's the one that'd say, 'Does that work? What do you think? How about, do you have,' and then he'll throw something in, and everything he throws in and everything he says, he says with authority and certainty, and he's just got a great thing that he adds to it. Kirk's been a little more coming-and-going because of the birth of his son and some of the things that he's been dealing with, so Rob has been a constant. And listen, Kirk adds some wonderful dimensions to the stuff.

SW: Jason was always a new guy with a chip on his shoulder. With Robert, it was like he wasn't the new guy.
LU: Yeah. And it's interesting because just when you said that, no disre-

Now it's kind of like [two] boring old women who sit around and text each other and talk about how great a week we had and *how awesome those three songs we worked on last week sound*. It's kind of lame. But it's pretty fucking nice and I wouldn't really have it any other way, because it makes it *a lot more fun*.

spect to Jason, but I think that it became increasingly easy to hang the differences in personality on the 'new guy' tag. It was almost like a convenience. And I think that now we just realize that, fucking God bless Jason and everything he did for this band and everything he did, he brought to us his strength, but in terms of the personalities gelling, it never gelled and it became, it was more forced. And with Rob there's just an incredibly, to use the word again, organic kind of thing. But who the fuck knows? I mean if Rob had walked in the door in 1986 like Jason did, it maybe wouldn't have been right, who knows. You can always bring those elements into as you sit and try to analyze it or speculate or whatever, but at this point in time and this point in our lives, Rob is just, it's just a godsend, like I've said so many times. And not just personality-wise but he's just an incredibly gifted musician. Me and James can be, because we know each other so well that we know what's coming next. And so we're always one step ahead of what's going on. I don't know how else to articulate it. And that can be an incredibly challenging thing to keep up with when it's happening in front of you. And Rob really does that well. It's like when something is being created, and just like 30 minutes of unfolding, it can be a difficult thing to hang onto. It's like swinging from this helicopter that's moving and you're just trying to hang onto this rope. And he does that, and he is right there in that moment and he's very gifted in that way that he can keep up with it. And that can be very challenging, and he does that very well.

SW: Do you and James still fight?

LU: No. No, I can't say that we do. I'm looking for something to give you here but there really isn't anything. I would say that the last great barrier that had to be crossed was the things in our personal lives where—how can I say that?

SW: Is it a healthier discourse now?

LU: No, I think there were some times where I would feel that James was judging me and judging my actions and judging my choices, and judging how some of those choices would play into the Metallica—well, not so much esthetic but more the Metallica responsibility, I think, and in terms of showing up on time and doing what needed to be done and being as present in the moment as physically able in the moment. And I used to feel that he was on a bit of a pedestal about some of that stuff and I felt that he was unjustly so because he also had a history of not necessarily bringing his best. And I felt that there were once or twice early on in this process, that had to be tested, and somehow, somewhere in the last year, that kind of also fell to the sideline. Probably as much in my head as in reality or as in his head. Both of us probably wear our emotions incredibly too much on our sleeves and we're very honest people. There was always going to be some blow up if you'd get that look from him or that attitude or something like that, and in the wrong situation it would send me off. And that doesn't really happen anymore because I don't really get that vibe from him anymore. And I don't feel that there's a part of him that's looking for something to judge or ready to judge or finger-whack when it's not just going according to his wishes or to his way. And somehow in the last year it's sort of like that's subsided too, and now it's kind of like boring old women who sit around and text each other and talk about how great a week we had and how awesome those three songs we worked on last week sound. It's kind of lame. But it's pretty fucking nice and I wouldn't really have it any other way, because it makes it a lot more fun, I don't think I could do it the other way anymore with all the responsibilities of parenting and single parenting, and relationships and all this other stuff that goes on. If this was 1995, I'm not sure how much of that I would stand for. I mean it's not a question of dedication, but it becomes, you know… listen. Let's not bullshit each other. Metallica is not the most important thing in my life like it was 10 years ago or 20 years ago. It's a huge, huge part of my life but it's not the most important thing in my life. My family, my kids, my relationship with Connie, my sanity, my body, my fucking father, Molly. Do you know what I mean? Those are the most important things in my life, and Metallica sits very comfortably in there, very close to the top. But if it was a choice, if I had to make a choice I'd take my family. And I know he feels the same way. So we've found a way for the most important thing in the last 20 years of our lives to co-exist with the most important thing in our lives for the last five years or whatever it is, and for them to all live together in a happy medium. But you know, so we've had to continue to mold Metallica to what our other needs are in our lives, and

I think we've done that pretty well. The best thing about mine and his relationship is that even though we view the world fairly differently, we view Metallica's place in those worlds pretty similarly. There's a fucking quote. And I think that's the reason Metallica's so healthy.

SW: This is your last album for Warner Bros. After that, what happens? Will you put them out yourself?
LU: We'll figure that out when we get there. It's certainly one of the options. So, make a new deal with Warner Bros., make a new deal with someone else, make a P&D deal with somebody, put 'em out on the Internet, sell 'em out of my trunk, I don't know. I mean, there's a whole range of options. Everything seems to be shifting faster than you keep track of, it's like everything that we're living with right now might be obsolete, so we might find a way to, as we're sitting here writing the song, it gets transmitted into a chip that people have in their brain instantly, and... who the fuck knows? So it is the last record, and right now we're just trying to get through this one. What happens on the other side, I mean that's what Peter and Cliff get paid to figure out. Obviously we will figure it out together but for somebody who likes to control the future by having the ability to see it quicker than most other people around him, that's still a little too far into my future.

JU What do you feel like you still want to achieve creatively or personally? Some idea that's not musical...
LU: I would say that film is certainly lurking dangerously close to the surface. Obviously being around the film world with Connie, I would say probably I have more friends in film than I have in music, and most of the people that we socialize with are in film. I would say that, and also having gone through the experience of a film there's some sort of film endeavors in there at some point if I can find the time, and if I want to tackle it. I think certainly creatively it's pretty obvious, but in what shape and form and with who and when, you know, I sat down and worked a little bit on a project with a friend of mine a couple years ago when we were dormant, that year James was away, and that project is still lingering. He's been doing other things since then. But you know, there's some film stuff out there at some point. Like I said, most of the people we hang out with are in the film business and I would say most of my time spent away from my family or from my kids, away from my family or from Metallica, is film-based. So it's like last weekend, I didn't have my kids last weekend and we didn't have any plans. I mean it was so chill, I think I saw seven movies last weekend.

SW: What did you see?
LU: Like look in the paper, that's all I saw. And then when we go and hang out with people it's film people and stuff, so it's pretty much, I think unavoidable.

SW: And you'd always live here, I mean you wouldn't relocate to Los Angeles.
LU: No. Fuck, no.

SW: Okay, what about bands like Trivium and The Sword, where do you see them? Do they push you?
LU: Sure. Sure. They push me. I mean they push us. I think we've always kept an ear and an eye open for whatever everybody else is doing, and certainly some of these bands are inspiring. I mean I would say that in the last six months for me, I think The Sword is, when I need to listen to some kick-my-ass heavy metal, I just listen to The Sword. I mean I listen to Trivium, but The Sword is a little more in line with what I grew up with. I mean The Sword just, it's 1981 all over again. I mean they sound more like a new wave version of a metal band than most of the bands did in the new wave of British heavy metal. Trivium are great, Bullet For My Valentine, Mastodon. I try to keep up with all of them. Some of them, I sort of realize (my old diplomatic self here) that it's not just about what you like and what you don't like, it's also about what inspires you or what doesn't inspire you. It's also about what you respect and what you don't respect. You can like somebody but not respect them, and you can respect somebody and not like them, you can be inspired by somebody but not like them. You can be inspired by somebody but not respect them. I mean it covers all sides of it. I really respect Mastodon. I sat two, three nights ago and watched their DVD. It's not something I'd get off on particularly musically, but I sat and looked at that drummer and it was like 'Fuck, this guy's a motherfucker, but it's not who I want to be.' Do you know what I mean?

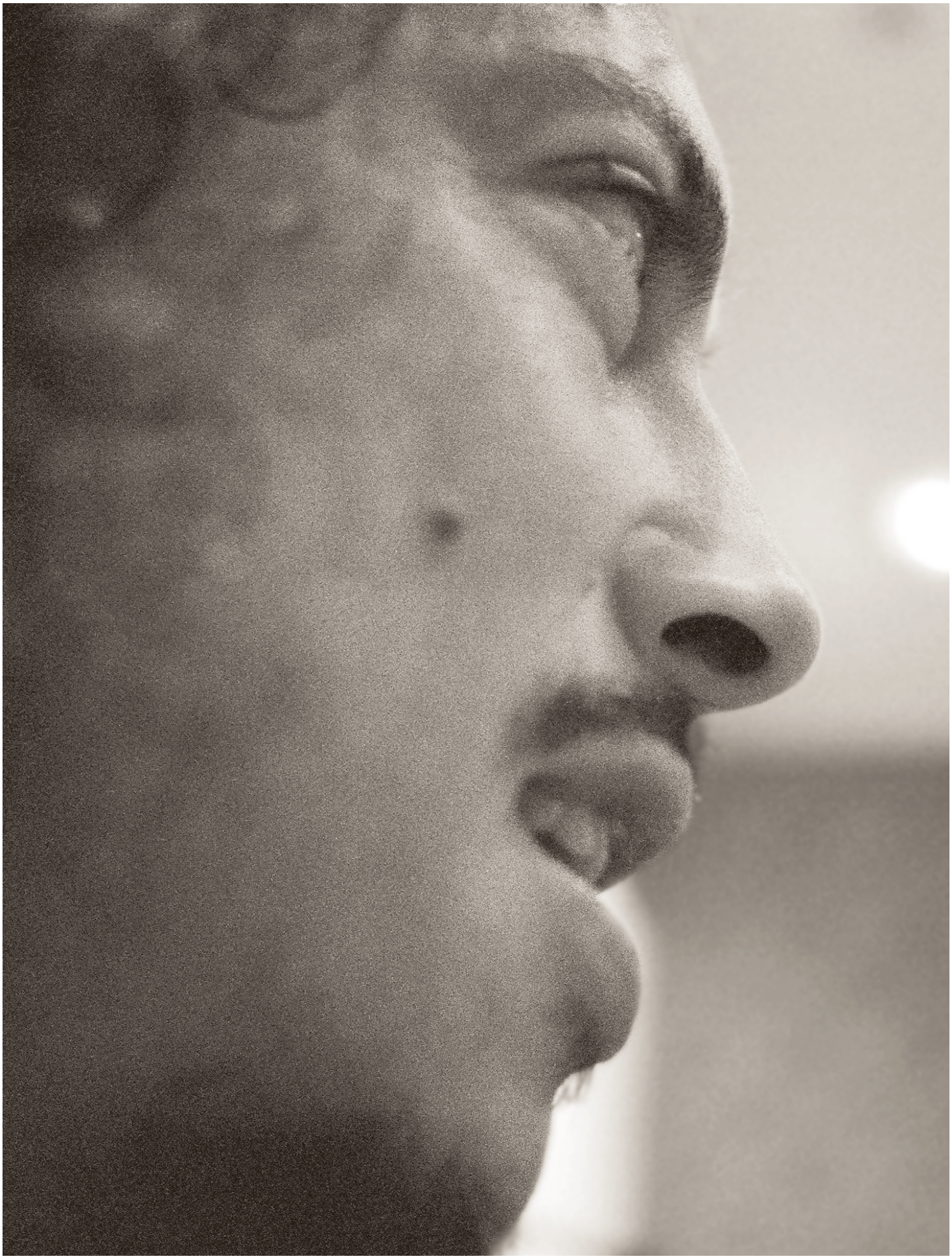
SW: Who did you want to be?
LU: I'm pretty comfortable in my own skin.

LU: But when you were a little kid...
LU: You know, when I was a little kid, if you asked me this in 1975 I would probably say Ian Paice from Deep Purple, John Coghlan from Status Quo. A little later it became Phil Taylor from Motorhead, Phil Rudd from AC/DC. And I would say that probably the guy that I admired the most this past six months, this year, I really like Taylor Hawkins from the Foo Fighters. I think that he does an amazing amount within the confines of what they do, and he really brings, I think, as much of an edge to rock-pop songs as any drummer can do within the confines of, because some of the Foo Fighters stuff is very poppy. It's very, very good but it's very poppy, and he kind of puts an edge to some of it that I really admire a lot.

SW: Do you see doing seasonal tours around the kids or are you going to go out for a full on tour?
LU: Seasonal tours around the kids!!! Where do I sign up for that? Yeah, I don't think Peter Mensch has that in mind for the next Metallica album, but we'll see. This summer was fucking, it was so cool. I mean three weeks in Europe in June, what more do you want? Quick visit to Japan, Korea in August, what more do you want? It's great. Japan in five days instead of three weeks, Europe in three weeks instead of three months. And I don't mean that in a bad way, I just mean because it's just like anything that you exaggerate and beat to death just gets so, you know. And doing three weeks of Europe this summer was awesome. I'd love to do three weeks in Europe every year. It's just like set your clock to it, go to Europe every June and do three weeks, it's awesome. And go to Australia in August, and then the next year go to Japan and the third year go to South America. I would love to do that. I mean I know that there are some compromises that need to be made but I certainly don't, the idea of, like I've said before, 'Now let's go out and play 180 dates over 220 days,' that's not going to happen anymore. And once again the best thing about that is that me and James, the kids have the same school schedules and all that type of stuff so everything is kind of lined up. It'll be real interesting on the next record to see how the touring fits into our lives. It'll be real interesting. I don't know how it's going to. I know that there will have to be some serious concessions, but we'll figure it out. I mean the bottom line is that all this thing with timelines, and you gotta hurry up and do this, it is what it is. And if you're going to play 180 dates then maybe you're going to play 180 dates but we might play 180 dates over 450 days instead of over 250 days, who knows? And I don't know if it's necessary to play five shows in the Dakotas anymore. I don't know if it's necessary to play 23 shows in Germany. I don't know. I just don't know. We will figure it out when we get to it, and we'll find the right balances. So far, you were asking me what my goals are, I mean my only goal is just to survive for as long as possible with one foot in relevance and another foot in sanity. And I'd say that the prospects for that are pretty good, especially since we are so in command of the ship. And so it is what it is, and if that means seasonal touring, then it means seasonal touring. And if we want to go out and do a couple of months here, a couple months there, we'll figure it out. We'll find the balances, and I have great faith in that.

SW: Your greatest strength.
LU: My openness.

SW: Okay, and one thing you'd change about yourself.
LU: My posture.



Kirk Hammett is on maternity leave? Could that be right? The rest of the band are keeping regular hours, almost religiously punching the clock at the stroke of 11 each morning, but Kirk has not been in attendance. Why? Because he's spent the last five weeks in Hawaii at his in-laws' house helping to tend to the needs of his son Angel Ray Keala Hammett. And before you ask, yes, the infant was named for Stevie Ray Vaughan.

"Sorry I'm late, I just got off a plane two nights ago," explains Kirk, his back to me as he drops strawberries, blueberries a whole banana, yogurt and honey into a whirring blender. Drowning out his voice, as he hikes the speed up to "macerate," the guitarist checks the consistency then pours a full 24 ounces of this concoction into a glass and takes a sip. "That's perfect," he says, and gestures for me to follow him upstairs to Robert Trujillo's "office" in the upper reaches of Metallica's compound. Threading our way in between the surfboard, a keyboard, a wooden coffee table and two basses propped up against the wall, we finally settle in right under a

Kirk Hammett

SO WHAT! interview

cherished photo of Robert's bass icon Jaco Pastorius, on this understated black leather couch, a newer doppelganger of the one that graces the control room.

"Yeah I just got back from Hawaii, and I haven't adjusted yet," Kirk apologizes, for nothing in particular, as it's not exactly clear what he's adjusting to — jet lag, that the band worked on four songs since his absence and he now feels that he has to play catch up, or just the angst and sleeplessness of new fatherhood. I'd say all of the above, but the lack of sleep has taken a little bit of a toll on his always gaunt features, and there are tell-tale signs of worry—since he left baby Angel and his wife Lani in Hawaii, while he returned to work on the album. "It's the first time that I've been away from him and it's harder than I thought," he confides.

Then there's the latest visit from Rick Rubin who is due to arrive the next day to check on their progress. Although that visitation doesn't seem to daunt him in the least. "I'll tell you how it went on Friday," he laughs. "We have no idea because we just don't know what's going to happen. It's funny. I mean this is like maybe our third meeting, third or fourth meeting with him? And he definitely hasn't been here through the whole process. But at least we have pictures of him just to remind us that he's a part of this process somewhere. We have his pictures up to remind us that he's producing our album. Maybe that's how he does it. The mere picture of him causes us to work better," jokes Kirk, betraying a little more of his trademark dry sense of humor.

It's strange to see this former creature of the night in today's guise. His nightself was always immaculately dressed—whether it was in perfectly cut Duarte jeans, and hand-tooled leather boots, or black velvet jackets and crisp, perfect shirts, the sort that Brian Jones used to wear when the stones were engaged in mortal battle for their very souls. But today, Kirk is betraying his East Bay roots, wearing white Vans embellished with grinning black skulls, worn with black boot-cut black pants. Not quite a fashion faux pas, but marking your origins as much as if you peppered your conversation with "hella's." He's topped it off with an oversized long sleeved blue T-shirt, that seems far too casual for this rock fashion god.

And that isn't the only thing that has changed. I think we're long overdue addressing that screaming pink smoothie. "Have you always eaten this healthy?" I inquire. "No, no. It was total junk. sometimes like hamburgers or whatever, back in the day. But now that smoothie thing is very good for you."

And so is not indulging in the nefarious substances of yore. Except for the occasional wine with dinner, Kirk Hammett has eschewed his former wicked, wicked ways, as has most of the band. "I have an occasional drink here and there but the bingeing thing I'm totally not into. I used to binge three or four times a week with just a whole plethora of other substances. But that's something that's pretty much a thing of the past."

And it shows. Despite the heavy lidded eyes and the very fine strands of silver that are woven into his wavy hair, there is very little to indicate that this man just celebrated his 44th birthday a week ago and there's even less to indicate that he plans to stop his creative outpourings anytime soon—in fact he's finally trying his skilled hand at writing lyrics, with James Hetfield's urgings. "I've got a lot left to do. And for me it goes even beyond music. The people in my family have always been late bloomers."

Jaan Uhelszki

SO WHAT!: With this band it was like things fell apart so they could come back together a different way.
Kirk Hammett: Yeah, to reorganize. Everything was physically, mentally, spiritually, and emotionally restructured, so that we could continue. I mean, that's how I look at it in a nutshell. I like to think it's not that simple, but that is basically what happened.

SW: It's pretty much like Mach 2 Metallica.
KH: Yeah. And in the process, gaining another band member who's just as solid and just as committed, and more hungry because he wants to establish his place, his role in the band..

SW: He (Robert Trujillo) told me he comes here and sometimes works 'til 2:30 in the morning. It's like, who does that?
KH:. None of us. I mean we used to do that with every single album, and we would work until all hours of the morning. But that kind of mentality does not predominate with the three of us now. I'm sure we could do it if we needed to, and I'm sure we'll need in the future to do that, but it's not a predominating pattern with us, but it is with Rob, only because he's just so hungry for it. It's great, and it totally rubs off, it's inspiring.

SW: It's so different from Jason Newsted always feeling like he was the new guy, and Rob doing everything in the world to prove that he was just one of you guys. He doesn't have that taint of being the new guy that Jason assumed.
KH: Not at all.

SW: But when Jason came into the band, everybody was more adversarial. It was like a meaner line-up.
KH: It was. Plus he had some pretty big shoes to fill, too. And he never really quite got out of the shadow of Cliff Burton and what the band was before him, sorry to say.

SW: I saw him on that Rockstar Supernova, and I found that quite an odd thing for him to be involved with.
KH: I didn't watch that because I just didn't want to watch Jason in that situation. I'd rather just let him not taint my memories with him.

SW: You're the one who was the biggest proponent to keep him, because I remember how you went to him and just said, 'Hey, don't go.' You were really a champ during that time period.
KH: Yeah. But you know, he did go and as a result I guess it just was something that needed to happen for all of us, and I was just trying to give him the benefit of the doubt but—

SW: He was right, you know?
KH: He was right. I mean absolutely, he was right in leaving the band. I mean it was a huge self-sacrifice but it was also a sacrifice to Metallica. I mean, I just have to totally agree with you 100 percent, Jaan. He was right.

SW: I didn't see it then but when I talked to him he was so fixed in his resolve. But I didn't think he was going to stick with it. I thought he'd come back. I actually give him a lot for being that prescient about it all, and I hope something else works out for him bigger, so he finds his place. Because the thing is, he's really talented.
KH: Yeah. I really think that he needs to find his place, but I don't think it's in something like Supernova. That's just joining the media circus.

SW: I got this news release last month that he had had some accident and was out of commission for six months. But perhaps he was out of body because in his heart he knows that was just a goof, that was just a bad cartoon, because he's bigger than that. So I think he was probably split about being part of that, anyway. That's just my feeling, and that's spiritual, you know?
KH: Yeah. I think spiritually he has a lot of facing up to do.

SW: Yeah, I think so too. He's so angry.
KH: Yeah.

SW: I thought about the anger that used to fuel this band, and he was angry for such different reasons. I could always understand like James' anger, and I could totally understand Lars' anger, and your anger is very, very banked. It doesn't come out like anger. I don't really think you have anger, that's not your mode of force.
KH: My anger is a weird sort of anger. It's an inner anger and not an overt sort of anger. But I talked to my psychiatrist and he asked me the classic question, what are you angry about? But you were saying about the anger thing. I agree, I mean Jason's anger was different.

KH: Yeah, exactly. I also think I bring a little bit of a virtuostic flair to everything too, with the guitar solos and the technique. If you look at it all, my playing is like icing. Icing's good, but too much is bad for you. Yeah, I'm part of the batter and I'm also part of the icing, whereas Lars and James are more the cake, and Robert and I are there to make the cake stand, and we're all our own different layers. If I can use, you know, a sort of analogy.

SW: Okay, if Metallica's a cake, what flavor is it?
KH: Definitely multi-flavored.

SW: Devil's food?
KH: Yeah, exactly. Devil's food. It would be a chocolate cake with vanilla frosting and fruit in the middle, with a lot of gravy and all packed in there, with a big old file in the middle.

> our time with *Bob was great*, and he was such a great leader. He was almost like a coach. He would coach us through a lot of *the processes of making a record*, and not having him there kind of left us to our own devices, which is what we used to do back in the day.

SW: So, the new music. When did you officially start recording, or thinking about the album? What was the beginning of this album cycle?
KH: It was sometime around my birthday of last year, and it all started with listening to a bunch of CDs that were of music that we had written on tour, mainly in the rehearsal room setups that we go into before we go onstage. And that in itself was a daunting process that I got totally lost in, because almost everything I listened to, I thought was great. And I had a hard time picking this riff and this riff, because I'd think they're both equally great. It's different when this riff is in this song and this riff is in that song, and it's easy for me to say that song is better than this song. But from riff to riff, it's something completely different from that, and I just totally got lost in it, and said to Lars, 'It's really difficult for me, man, because all this stuff sounds really good and all of it has potential.' I got all the CDs that were given out. I would listen to them, and I would pretty much see what everyone else would pick, and just go from there. I think that a lot of the riffs that James writes are just brilliant, and you can do anything with them. And of course, you know, I think a lot of my riffs, even if they aren't brilliant, are brilliant.

SW: No, they are brilliant.
KH: I mean you know, I was just kind of lost. So it was, I think, a good thing that I just kind of let those guys pick the riffs and then we would start to develop them as songs. And once the seeds of the ideas were picked, then I could say, 'All right, glue this riff onto that riff and that riff onto this riff,' or 'Hey, I got something here,' or 'Hey, check it out, this just came to me.' Which is something that all four of us started doing.

SW: In terms of the aesthetic, what do you think your greatest strength is that you bring to the band? It's like Lars and James are like two bucks and they butt heads, and what falls out after they come apart is what usually is there.
KH: I think, you know, I'm a different kind of spice in there. I'm just another different layer in there. And those guys might tend to think one certain way, and I hope that I fill in something that adds a little bit of different color, a different flavor in there. I mean that's one of the things that I bring to the table. Also, I like to think that I write a lot of catchy riffs. Not necessarily heavy riffs, though I do think I write some pretty heavy stuff. But I just have a tendency to think catchiness when it comes to writing pieces of music or passages of music. Not so much melodiousness, just catchiness, something that's really accessible. Not necessarily heaviness, but just catchiness.

SW: That's good, because that's important too. Not you just being one of those lumbering monsters, you know?

SW: The last time you really had a regimented schedule, was when you were doing "St. Anger." Are you all more or less keeping regular hours? Or is this just only kind of demo-ing because you haven't tracked anything yet?
KH: This all demo-ing, even though for some reason it feels like the real thing. But it always feels like the real thing to me. And even when we're demo-ing I just think, 'Oh, my God, this feels like the real thing,' and so I kind of take everything for what it is. Like this is the real thing and that just needs to be better, so we need to make it better. Or not.

SW: Will you be able to keep any of these recordings, or do you think you'll start from go when you go down to Los Angeles to record with Rick Rubin?
KH: That remains to be seen. Because it's Pro-Tools now, you can save anything and ship it into any sort of situation or format. But as far as scheduling is concerned, I mean we're still demo-ing. Everyone kind of gets here when they can get here and needs to get here, me always being the latest one.

SW: I never noticed that about you. I always thought it was Lars who was late.
KH: Well, Lars isn't late only because he has to take his kids to school. So that automatically makes him early all the time. I try to make it here by eleven, unless there's an interview or something or other where we need to start at ten. It's great that the band let me take five weeks off to be with my wife and baby, and I really, really appreciate that. But now I feel like I'm playing catch-up. Listening and learning the four songs that were put together while I was gone, and like, recognizing riffs in the songs and thinking, 'Oh, my God, I do know that because we jammed on it in Poughkeepsie, that's the Poughkeepsie riff. Okay, I think I know that one.' It's a little frustrating because I want to be in sync with everyone else, but everyone's kind of moved forward so I'm now in the quagmire of playing catch-up.

SW: You got back Monday, or Sunday night?
KH: Sunday night, yeah. I came in Monday and it was very evident I was still kind of out there, and the guys said, 'You need a little bit more rest. Take Tuesday to rest, come back Wednesday.' I'm like, thanks, guys.

SW: But it's kind of great that you got a maternity leave?
KH: Yeah. Yeah. For sure. I'm very grateful for that, because I've watched all the other guys with all their family experiences and how they needed time to do this or time to do that for their kids and their family. And I always went with it, without really just making much of a fuss about it, because it's their family. I mean there's no need to make a fuss about it. They

should have that time. And I'm glad that they have gone through that before I had, so that when it comes time for me to ask for that they're totally understanding. And the five weeks off, no problem. They know it. They know how it feels.

SW: You're the last Metallica member to have a child. Are you the youngest?
KH: I'm the oldest. I'm the oldest by about three or four months. I'll be 44 next weekend. But 44 is the new 22! And the weird thing is, I feel like I'm in better shape now than I did when I was 34. And that's just weird to me.

SW: Just because you take better care of your health?
KH: Yeah. Yeah.

SW: You didn't always have smoothies for breakfast like today?
KH: No, no. It was total junk. Sometimes like hamburgers or whatever, back in the day. But, now that smoothie thing is very good for you.

SW: You don't drink anymore?
KH: Well, I have an occasional drink here and there but the bingeing thing, I'm totally not into. I used to binge three or four times a week with a, just a whole plethora of other substances. But that's something that's pretty much a thing of the past.

SW: I stopped it all in 1984.
KH: Nineteen eighty-four, I was stoned full on.

SW: I don't think I could ever give up drinking, not that I'm really that excessive.
KH: Yeah, I mean I'm the same way, too. Like maybe with dinner, but I'm not the guy that I used to be, with, 'Yeah, let's get a bottle of vodka and a bottle of gin and let's get a case of beer.' I'm just not that way anymore.

SW: Are you superstitious about not working with Bob Rock? Was there any moment when you thought, 'uh-oh, we're not working with Bob Rock, that's a bad thing?'
KH: At first it kind of felt like we'd really lost our safety net, but then things kind of made a turn and we got more confident, because we started writing songs that sounded more like us again. You know, the old us, before Bob Rock. And then it got me to thinking, our time with Bob was great, and he was such a great leader. He was almost like a coach. He would coach us through a lot of the processes of making a record, and not having him there kind of left us to our own devices, which is what we used to do back in the day, before Bob Rock. And I found that left to our own devices we developed something that's completely different and that's adulthood, I think. And more just us. And I think that's the really, really big difference at this point. I mean I'm sure that there will be other differences that'll show up along the recording process. But that's the glaring difference, to me.

SW: It forces you out of your comfort zone, you know?
KH: Yeah. Totally.

SW: You were in a womb-like situation for however long you guys had Phil Towle, you know?
KH: Um hum. Yeah.

SW: And then that took its toll, took its whole course and ended, but now it's like you're in the stage of inventing who you are again.
KH: Yeah, and we have Rob Trujillo who's great and has such a great forward motion. He really just takes the initiative a lot of the times when we're just kind of like sitting around waiting for something to happen. Rob will pick up the baton and run with it.

SW: And he actually he does, too. Doesn't he go out there and run?
KH: Yeah, he does.

SW: He's much thinner than he was last time I saw him. Actually everybody's in really good shape. I mean Lars looks like a male model. But, you're always thin.
KH: Well, I mean, I have my moments.

SW: Is there a firm date when you're going to meet up with Rick Rubin again?
KH: Yeah, tomorrow.

SW: Does that mean it will begin tomorrow? Or does that mean you have plans for when it will begin?
KH: I'll tell you on Friday. We have no idea, actually, what could happen, because we just don't know what's going to happen. It's funny. I mean this is like maybe our third meeting, third or fourth meeting with him? And he definitely hasn't been here through the whole process.

SW: But you have those pictures of him.
KH: Yeah, at least we have pictures of him. Not with us, but we have pictures of him just to remind us that he's a part of this process somewhere. We have his pictures up to remind us that he's producing our album.

SW: Did you think that maybe it's just an illusion?
KH: Yeah, maybe that's how he does it. The mere picture of him causes us to work better. I don't know.

SW: What made him the right guy?
KH: I don't know. We still have some doubts.

SW: How'd it come up? You know, wanting to work with Rick?
KH: Well, we needed a change.

SW: Yeah, I know, but why him?
KH: Well, I have to tell you, I really loved the System of the Down albums, I really loved the Mars Volta album. And those are two albums that he really did a good job on. I mean that got me thinking. And then people were coming up to me and saying, you guys should use Rick Rubin. It all seemed so synchronistic. Yeah.

SW: Like the Celestine Prophecy?
KH: Yeah, totally, totally. I mean it's just, you know, our destinies were interwoven. My friend Scott Ian—you know Scott, he's in Anthrax. He came up to me and he said, 'Hey, you guys should use Rick Rubin.' I'm like, not a bad idea, Scott. And then when it actually came time to talk about it, the whole band spoke about it and I was like, 'Sure, I'm interested.' I'm just a big fan of those two albums.

SW: Are you going in with songs, or are you writing as you go? How are they shaping up?
KH: We have a seed of an idea, a riff or like a musical passage, and then we just start jamming on it and riffing on it, and it suggests other things, other riffs, other melodies, and we just run with it. I mean it isn't any different than it has been in the past, and it's just the same process. And Lars is great at arranging things and extrapolating arrangement ideas from all these musical passages. And it just builds and builds and builds. You find it just snowballing in front of you. And then four or five hours later you have a song, you're like, 'Wow, that's great. Where'd that come from?'

JU:. Is that process any different? Is that how it used to be?
KH: As far as I've known, that's how the process has always been. Sometimes it's just been with Lars and James, and sometimes it's been with Lars and James and I, sometimes it's been with Lars, James, me, and Robert. Sometimes it's with Lars, James, and Robert. I mean sometimes it's James and Robert. Sometimes it's Lars and I.

SW: It's not like when Phil Towle was here and everybody was throwing things out, though. That process is different than when you were writing "St. Anger," right?
KH: You mean musically?

SW: More lyrically.
KH: Yeah, that was the more lyrical side of things. Yeah, I don't know if we'll get to that because—

SW: Because you haven't written any words yet?
KH: No, and whenever I get a lyrical idea I throw it at James and James says "Write it down and write it out." Which is, you know, James's way of telling me that maybe I should just take the idea and run with it myself, and see if it sticks or not.

SW: Yeah, it's good, because you're so literate.
KH: Yeah, I have a way with words that I never, ever think of putting on paper. And I should start because I amuse myself all the time with just playing around with words. I've always been a late bloomer. I don't know why that is, and it's that way with a lot of people in my family, too. We're on some different human time scale.

SW: Does everybody live long in your family?
KH: Yeah, my grandmother just passed away two years ago. She lived to 102. It never feels like this is ever going to end until my life force ends. So whatever I'm going to be doing at any part of my life, I'm still going to be doing it. Does that make sense? It just doesn't feel like there's ever going to be an ending time for me.

SW: I'm not ever going to retire...
KH: Yeah, I feel that way too. And for me it goes even beyond music. I feel I still have things that I have to get done, and I just feel it in the back of my soul, and eventually I'll get around to it and do it. But I still feel like there's unfinished business for me to do. I don't know what it is, but—I guess what I don't understand is, why I can do it easily and why some people have to work so hard at it to achieve the same thing.

SW: Was it always this easy for you, even when you were little?
KH: No, it hasn't always been easy but it's easy now. I don't know. Maybe I'm suffering from perspective here.

SW: I hope you do get around to writing lyrics.
KH: Well, I'm actually about to begin that. Because James is kind of egging me on, so...

SW: Can you compare the stuff you're doing now with any other moment in Metallica history? Like could the stuff now fit on any of your albums of old? Does it feel like a continuation of "St. Anger?"
KH: It's totally different from "St. Anger" in that we sound like a band again. We sound like four guys making music, whereas in "St. Anger" it was from somewhere else. It's hard for me to pinpoint, it just came from somewhere else and we had different needs back then that we had to fulfill, different emotional needs I think that we were fulfilling as well as musical needs.

SW: It was an exorcism.
KH: Yeah. Totally, yeah.

SW: Like a purge.
KH: Yeah, it was a purge.

SW: To be cliché, "binge and purge."
KH: Yeah. It definitely was a purging experience.

SW: It's so personal.
KH: Yeah. Yeah, like insanely personal.

SW: Yeah, like you couldn't find the universality of it. Metallica's great strength has always been that they write code for the disaffected. Everybody can be "yeah, that's my band because I feel this way," but with "St. Anger," not everybody could feel that.
KH: Because it was so personal. It was so deeply within us, it was hard for other people to relate who just didn't have that capacity or didn't have that perspective. But I mean as far as comparing the stuff we do now to our past stuff, I would think that some of the things that we're writing do have that youthful sort of Metallica energy because we're coming from the same place. Again, we were left to our own devices, and we had to fill the gaps ourselves. We didn't have a producer around to fill any sort of gaps. And so I think some of the material was coming from that same place as some of our early stuff. But on the same perspective, on some of the songs we've kind of experimented with certain sounds and certain approaches, and certain riff ideas that have kind of mutated into something completely different that I don't think is on any of our albums. I mean we have this new song and it sounds like—

SW: Could you mention some song titles?
KH: You know, I don't really want to tell you any song titles because I don't know if they're working titles or not. But we have this new song and it's really, really dark and really, really intense in a Metallica kind of way, but the sound of it is different. I mean we arrive at that same sort of intensity but with different sounds and different approaches, and so it's interesting. And

also we're pulling out a lot of our technical abilities and those technical abilities shine again in the songs, and really showing people that we still can play. I mean we still can play intricate rhythms or interesting note patterns.

SW: Is that because there are bands like Trivium or The Sword who are taking their musical inspirations from old Metallica and you need to reclaim that place?
KH: There's The Sword, there's Trivium. I don't think it has much to do with that, even do we do like—

SW: Does it nip at your heels, though?
KH: We do like listening to those new bands because it's a nice tip of the hat to us, you know? I know those guys in Trivium, I think they're great guys and they're cool to hang out with. It's interesting to listen to them because it's a lot of our essence but kind of updated and regurgitated and thrown back at us. Kind of modernized, but not too modernized.

SW: What makes Metallica Metallica? Sometimes I come up with the anger, and sometimes the relationships. But what has always made you guys the biggest metal band? What's that magic ingredient?
KH: DNA. It is DNA. There's just like four individuals, you know? You get three or four guys in a room, they just tend to play a certain way. And if you get any other different three or four guys in a room, they'll play a different way. Or if you get the same two or three guys in a room, they'll still play differently

than the other three or four guys or whatever. I mean it is just the DNA of the situation. Because you can come up with a million reasons why—

SW: Do you think about this?
KH: Not too much.

SW: Yeah, but did you ever?
KH: Well, maybe so, maybe four or five months ago.

SW: Months ago? You've only been in the band like a zillion years.
KH: Yeah. But it's that cliché. I mean it's all chemistry. And it's such a cliché but it's just so truthful and it's just so human. It's such a human tendency. I mean you can't get that with machines, you can't get that with animals.

SW: Things go to bigger places when you have the right combination of people. They pervert a space-time continuum.
KH: We all seem to resonate with each other, musically, in our thought process and our decisions. When we're not in that creative space we don't necessarily resonate, but when we go into that creative zone we all seem

to resonate and complement each other, which is I think just a beautiful thing. When it all works it just blossoms into something very different than if just one of us did it, or if just two of us did it, or if just three of us did it.

SW: Did you have that same sense of connection when you were in Exodus?
KH: I've always felt this band was my home, always. Even when I had left the band that I had formed, Exodus, to join this band, it felt like I was leaving my home, when I finally was settled in this band I really felt I truly knew what home was, and I was with the people that I should be playing with.

SW: Over the past few years, what have you learned about your own process? I don't really like that question, I guess the Phil Towle thing got to me.
KH: It was strictly a phase. Or strictly a time that we needed to wade through to mentally restructure and reorganize. Mentally, spiritually, as well as physically and creatively.

SW: But are you sorry that you filmed it? Are you sorry that you made the movie?
KH: Yeah, because it's not what we are now and people might be misled if they watched it now and thought, well, this is how they are.

SW: All soft and squishy.
KH: Yeah, but it's not how we are. I mean we've moved on from there, and we were only that way just, you know—

SW: To fix yourselves.
KH: Yeah, and it wasn't permanent. It was only a brief passing in the whole cycle of our lifetimes and career.

SW: James told me a sense of shame about letting the world in on the band's problems. I was always surprised that he allowed it since he's such a stoic guy, like you never see him sweat. Lars told me moms at his sons' schools talk to him now, where they never would, because they think he's that warm fuzzy vulnerable guy in the movie. But I'm not sure that's who he is anymore either. Although with him, I think he was humanized more than anybody...
KH: Yeah, he did benefit from it a lot.

SW: I think he did the most, when I see the before and afters, he's definitely the after.
KH: Yeah. He's definitely benefited from it.

SW: Did Phil Towle fix everything or do you guys still fight about stuff?
KH: Yeah. I mean we still fight. But I mean it's not with that sort of intensity that we used to fight, because I think we communicate a lot better. Definitely communicate a lot better, and seems like there's less to fight about now. I don't know why. I think we've just matured and have just moved on from that point, because we used to fight a lot and now it's just, 'Oh, my God, just move on.'

SW: Or you don't want the same things, but maybe you did before. There seemed to be more power struggles before.
KH: Yeah. It was a lot more power struggles, and just finding our places and wanting to be heard. Some people needed to be heard more than others or something, and now they've learned that maybe they were struggling when there was no need to struggle.

SW: The dynamic's different with Jason gone too. So that probably changed it a lot. Robert is the newest guy and he is about keeping the peace, too, because he doesn't want to upset the apple cart because he's the last guy on it.
KH: But he's smart enough to navigate those waters and figure out what's best for the band, rather than what's best for him. I think a lot of times Jason had self-interests, whereas those self-interests were clashing with the old band interests.

SW: I could never figure him out. Tell me how Robert fits into the song writing dynamic, or even the creative dynamic.
KH: Well, he's just solid in there. I mean he's there just holding it all together with Lars, and when he has an idea it's usually really a killer. It's solid. Just like his personality.

SW: That's true, that's who he is.
KH: Yeah. And some of his bass lines we've turned into actual parts, which is great.

SW: Does he play bass like a lead player?
KH: He does. Yeah, he has that up front lead bass player tendency. I mean that's his hero right there, Jaco Pastorius, and Jaco was a guy who just played super out front, and his playing just had so many facets to it, and you cannot, there was no way you could not notice how he played the bass. The lines he played, they would just jump out, and you'd go, 'Whoa, that's cool, that's cool. And you're doing exactly what should be done right there.' I mean Rob's the same way. You're thinking, wow, that's a great

extrapolation of that musical idea, and we can use that extrapolation for a further music idea. I mean and that's how Rob tends to work, is his stuff is just so great and so tasteful you want to get more out of it.

SW: The bass player has always taken a huge role in Metallica's sound, but you are a predominately guitar-driven band.
KH: It definitely has always been a predominantly guitar-driven band. But I mean now that Rob is in the fold, he definitely has a driving force within his playing. Much like Cliff Burton did, there were just aspects to his playing that were so driving and so instrumental in the overall piece. You couldn't help but sit up and notice, and go, 'Whoa, that's just great.'

SW: Is there somebody else that was close to being chosen to replace Jason? Or was it always clear that he was going to be the guy?
KH: With Rob? In my brain, you know, when we first jammed with him, I just instantly knew. The other guys, I think it just wasn't so obvious with them because they had other intentions or maybe other agendas with other people. And that was fine. I knew that that would just play itself out.

SW: Was there ever a number two and three?
KH: You're asking the wrong person because I didn't even have a number two or three.

SW: But who did they like better?
KH: I don't know.

SW: Come on, you jammed with other people. Who do you think was even close?
KH: Maybe the guy who used to be in Kyuss, Scott Reader? It certainly wasn't Twiggy because Twiggy's just, you know... he's like a guitar player.

SW: My bass players have to be bass players.
KH: Bass players, not guitar players who play bass.

SW: Exactly, who want to steal the lead all the time, because I think that just doesn't work in a band and that happens too much.
KH: And you know, Pepper (Keenan – COC/Down) I think maybe was a contender, only because he was such an old friend of ours. But see, those were just like, they were more agendas than actual players.

SW: You said you've met with Rick Rubin. What do you think he'll bring to the production?
KH: I have no idea. That remains to be seen, but I guess it's somewhere along the lines of song craft and song quality.

SW: Has he given you any advice? I know on all those little pictures it says "organic." Is that part of this deal?
KH: Yeah, he says he wants us to use the ProTools less, and play more organically amongst ourselves. And sure, we might have been a little ProTools-heavy in the past, but I think nowadays we've bounced it out where we will actually go out there and jam and play amongst ourselves. And then if a part needs to be repeated four times instead of one, you can do it in ProTools.

SW: Yeah, it's just the initial get it down—
KH: Yeah, rather than having to go out there and play it four times again, we can do it just like that. And I think that's the balance we've found between that, though we haven't told Rick that.

SW: You're so goal directed, you all know who you are. It's almost at the point where you could do it yourself, you know?
KH: Yeah. I know. And we're hoping that Rick will know who we all are, and get a way to milk ourselves, or maybe he can milk us for whatever sort of potential he thinks that's still lying there within us or within the music or within the approach.

SW: The stuff you wouldn't figure out yourself. But the only reason you guys need a producer is there's stuff that he would see that you don't see yourselves.

KH: Yeah, perspective. We hope his perspective is what we're paying for.

SW: Yeah, because you're going to pay a lot. Damn, he's so expensive.
KH: He's also producing everyone. Everyone. Kid Rock, Lincoln Park, U2. I was thinking yesterday, doesn't he say no to anyone? I mean I'm not really convinced yet.

SW: Me neither. But if it's the best thing in the world for you to help you access your latent creativity, then it's worth money.
KH: We'll see.

SW: It's not like it's irrevocable. Who did you use prior to Bob Rock, Fleming?
KH: Flemming Rasmussen. He was more an engineer than anything. I wouldn't call him a producer per se. It was more him engineering.

SW: It's like you need a big thinker now. Somebody with a vision. Because everything else, you have. Lars has that organizing property. It's just that somebody has to see something that you don't see in yourselves. At this stage of your career, that's what you need.
KH: Yeah. I agree.

SW: What do you think you still need to achieve creatively or personally? Two different questions.
KH: Those are questions that I can take either two minutes or two months to answer, because I could just be real short and say 'a ton of things.'

SW: Okay, well, what about like your guitar playing? Where else do you need to take your guitar playing?
KH: I'm just constantly searching for a way to just totally, totally break down all the obstacles between my expression and my playing.

SW: Yeah. What's inside your head and what comes out of your instrument.
KH: Just breaking down those obstacles, and sometimes I get stuck in certain processes I use over again to express myself, and it's always a battle to break out of those safety zones and those safe processes and find different ways of expressing basically the same thing.

SW: Who does it? Like what guitar player's picture is on your wall? Who's your personal guitar talisman?
KH: Oh, well, Jimi Hendrix without a doubt. I mean just like the whole Hendrix thing now is so classic but also so dated.

SW: Yeah, well, just the form is dated. It's not, the fearlessness is not dated.
KH:. The form is dated but, exactly, the vibe is still there. And I have a ton of people I just love. I've been actually listening to a ton of jazz guitar players. I'm still just totally into jazz, because it just, that was a very challenging thing to play and to listen to and to just comprehend.

SW: Like who, what players?
KH: You know, Kenny Burrell. This guy named Tao Farlow. I mean I hear things in their playing that rock guys are playing nowadays, or still trying to play nowadays.

SW: Tell me about your son.
KH: My son is Angel. Angel Ray.

SW: What was the Ray for?
KH: It's like Stevie Ray Vaughan. Yeah, I like Ray as a middle name, and for what it stands for. You know, 'ray' as in 'light.'

SW: Hopefully he'll be as fearless as you, and be willing to take risks.
KH: Yeah, exactly. I mean change is so important to me in that I don't want to just be redundant. On the other hand it's really hard not to get stuck in the easy way to do things, and I am constantly going back and forth between those two things. And really it's all about finding new ways to express myself. It doesn't begin and end with music, you know, it's across

the board, whatever I do. It's all about personal growth and really just wanting to explore my own universe and express what I'm finding, really.

SW: What do you think about when you're onstage playing guitar?
KH: It's weird, I go from like totally being in the moment, totally involved, into sometimes just like a meditative space where I'm just not thinking at all, I'm just kind of experiencing things. And then sometimes it'll actually go off into some weird place and I'll think, 'Oh, my God, there's a guitar sitting on my bed, or under my bed, that I haven't played in seven years and I've got to take it out and do something about that.' You know. I'll be thinking about things like that while I'm onstage in front of 30,000 people. It just kind of floats all around, all over the place. But I know it feels the best when you don't have to think, it just happens, just react.

KH: I don't know, I just play from the inside. I just play from the inside out. And I want it to be accessible, so that people can understand and maybe the music can pull people into what I'm doing and what we're doing.

SW: When you think about this album, and it doesn't have a title yet, how do you describe it yourself?
KH: The album that is—well, I should say it like this. This is the album to show that Metallica is back to being a band. And we haven't necessarily been a band since the '80s. Yeah. But I mean it all depends on who you ask. In some people's opinions we haven't been a band since the '80s, and in other people's opinions we haven't been a band since the '90s. But I definitely feel like we're back to sounding like a band in this millennium.

> Some of my best guitar playing is the guitar playing I don't even think about. *It just happens spontaneously*, and I love that. And it's the same way with writing music. A lot of my best riffs I just literally walked into the room, picked up my guitar and started playing it. And it's there. It's almost *like turning on a radio* within yourself and you get a radio transmission inside, and then it comes out as this piece of music.

SW: Yeah, it's true. Like some muscle memory—
KH: Yeah, or it's almost like you're playing your instrument but something else is playing you.

SW: Yeah. That's deep. That's profound.
KH: Yeah. But it does feel like that. I mean it does feel like something is just unfolding in a very natural way. But it's just unfolding, it's just being. And that's when it feels the best because I truly feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. And it's just so pure, 100 percent. There's no doubt, there's no agenda, there's no anything. It's just unfolding and it's just pure and it's bringing me happiness and everyone else happiness, and that's a beautiful thing, to experience that.

SW: Without thought. I know what you mean, too... and I go, 'wow, I'm having a perfect moment...'
KH: Yeah. Exactly.

SW: But that thought isn't even born, it's like you're pure light or something.
KH: Yeah, yeah, exactly. But some of my best guitar playing is the guitar playing I don't even think about. It just comes out. There's not even a thought for it. It just happens spontaneously, and I love that. And it's the same way with writing music. A lot of the best riffs that are being used for the band, a lot of my best riffs I think that are being used for the band are riffs that I didn't sit down and think, 'Okay, I'm going to play this way.' I just literally walked into the room, picked up my guitar, and started playing it. And it's there. I mean it's almost like turning on a radio within yourself and then you get a radio transmission inside, and then it comes out as this piece of music. And it's just a wonderful thing. I only use that analogy because I've heard that analogy before and I really agree with it.

SW: Have you ever taught guitar?
KH: No. I don't have much patience for teaching people really developed concepts. I mean if someone wants to learn something that we've created, I'll take the time to show them that. But as far as like actual technique and learning how to use technique and play, and use concepts like harmony and scales and whatnot, I mean that's a lot of work. That's a lot of work to teach someone, and I just don't have the patience for that these days.

SW: Characterize your playing. If somebody asked you how you play guitar, what would you say?

SW: Are there any themes tying this stuff together musically?
KH: There is a really unusual theme that's working its way into the music. I'm not really sure how to react to it. Maybe it's someone else trying to tell us that we should react to it, but a lot of the music has an eastern harmonic flair to it, a harmonic minor flair to it, and when I say harmonic minor, that could be construed as like eastern sounding or Middle Eastern sounding or maybe Arabic? I don't know if it's just the zeitgeist, a sign of the times, or maybe because like, you know, Middle Eastern culture is so prevalent, or maybe the negative things about Middle Eastern culture. Maybe artists are conscious, just want to shine light on the positive aspects of Middle Eastern culture, i.e. the music. But there's passages that sound, that use harmonic minor and dominant, and those sounds are distinctly Arabic sounding or Middle Eastern sounding, and you hear them in the songs. At the less likely times, all of a sudden they'll turn a corner and there we are, smack, right dab there in Syria or Iraq, as far as culture is concerned. We're playing notes that were played, have been played for thousands of years, that aren't born in western culture, and it's just a trip to see. And maybe I'm the first one to really vocalize it, but it's just there.

SW: I do think that's sometimes a message or there's some information that gets out in some kind of group consciousness. You know, and then you're doing that.
KH: I totally believe that.

SW: Oh, me too, always. The time is right, when the time is right, an idea is born, you know?
KH: It could just be the universe telling us something, you know?

SW: I know, it's true. Because information becomes admitted in a certain way, because a lot of people move in great groups rather than just as individuals.
KH: Well, yeah. You know, I'm of the belief that everything and everyone is connected and interwoven. And you know, a thought, more so a thought than an action, can influence things greatly. I think thoughts are like when you take a rock and you throw it into a puddle, and you have the ripples. You throw your rock in there and you see your ripple and someone throws their rock in, and you'll see that ripple kind of like mesh with the ripple of my rock and then it becomes something totally different, a completely different sort of thing. I actually see life and my connection to the universe like that. I mean that's my belief on how it is.

SW: That's really holy, you know?
KH: Well, it's not original. That thought has been around for, again, thousands of years. But I happen to believe it's my reality, so I try to live very purely, with pure thoughts, and make sure that whatever I do doesn't impact people in a negative way, only positive ways.

SW: Yeah, you always have used your power for good. I mean for a Scorpio, you don't have that thing.
KH: I do have it, and it has come out, but it's really intense and I try not to go there because it's just really intense and it really has a lot of ability to really shake things up and, yeah, I don't go there because it's really effective when I do go there, and I don't want to.

SW: On a human level or on like more like a psychic level?
KH: Both. Human and psychic. Sometimes I feel that when the dark side comes up in me it influences everything and everyone around me, and everyone is on that same tip or is affected by it greatly. I just want everything to be well for my son, and I want my son to benefit from all this.

SW: You know, because you make great art, and you've made a really stable life for yourself and your family, considering how crazy you really are. I like your madness. Your madness fuels your playing, your very creativity.
KH: Well, and since we're on that subject, I was taking anti-depressive pills but then decided not to. After being on them for like almost a year, I thought, well, is this the real me or is this the me through the help of a pill? And I decided I'm just going to deal with the real me and I threw all the pills away. And it's been a little bit more difficult for me to deal, but at least I know it's real and true and honest, and I have to be accountable for it.

SW: You do. About two years before he died, Joey Ramone told me he was taking Prozac but it hampered his creativity. 'I just can't write anymore...' But I don't think he ever got off of them.
KH: Yeah, I don't play guitar. When I'm on that stuff, I don't—I'm content, but for all the wrong reasons.

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